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And his Little Friends.

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A TALE.

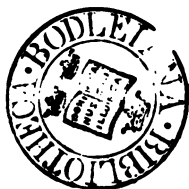
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The Master of Churchill Abbots, And his Little Friends.

CHAPTER I.

ANTICIPATION.

"HURRAH! Adele is coming, Aunt Anna, Adele is coming; Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Aunt Anna put her hands playfully to her ears, as though deafened by her nephew's vociferations. "Charlie! Charlie!" she said, reprovingly, and with a shake of her pretty head.

"But you are glad, Auntie dear, are you not?" murmured the soft, coaxing tones of a little girl, —and Aunt Anna's pet niece nestled up to her side with a look of earnest inquiry in her lustrous hazel eyes.

"I don't know, indeed, Maud," was the reply, accompanied by an air of assumed anxiety; "My responsibilities are already overwhelming; with

another child on my hands they will become quite too much for me."

"Oh! you naughty Aunt Anna!" said Charlie, throwing his arms round her, "You're always pretending to be sorry about things when we know you are really glad. If you want people to believe you are a poor, careworn old auntie, why don't you put a grey wig on, and pucker up your mouth—so?"

"Because I have a mischievous monkey of a nephew, who insists on treating me like a young thing, and wouldn't be persuaded into showing me proper respect, by my donning all the grey hair in the world." And she laughed, and tossed aside her golden curls, and touched with her soft red lips Master Charlie's sunburnt cheek; looking, to say the truth, as little old or careworn as a pretty merry girl of seventeen has a right to look. The children hung about her, Charlie lavishing on her innumerable caresses, in his rough, boyish fashion. He was as fond of her as it was possible for boy to be. Grandmamma and Aunt Harriet, the two authorities of the house, were quite second in his estimation to little Aunt Anna. He was still leaning over her chair, and whispering in his most seductive tones a request that she would procure a whole holiday for him, when the opening of the room door interrupted his coaxing, and brought him suddenly to an attitude of attention.

A stranger would have seen little cause for this change of demeanour, in the entrance of the stately, dark-haired girl, some years older than Anna, who,

advancing quietly up the room, glanced smilingly at the children's faces, and asked them if in their rejoicing they had forgotten their usual lesson hour; but Charlie knew that those clear grey eyes would soon have to rest on a blotted exercise and an ill-written copy: and melancholy experience had taught him to fear for the result.

"Mayn't we have a holiday, Aunt Harriet, in honour of Adele's coming?" he asked anxiously, with a little nudge to his younger aunt, as a hint to second the request.

But the disappointing answer came, "Not to-day, Charlie,—it will be time enough for holidays when Adele really comes, and we must not expect her for a week, at least."

"Ah! mia cara, be good-natured, and give poor little Master Nobook a holiday for once!" pleaded Anna, passing one arm caressingly around her sister's waist.

"As a good way of turning him into Sir Timothy Bluestocking?" was the smiling reply. "No, no, Anna,—Master Nobook will be all the better for having a few crumbs of knowledge drilled into his empty little head. Come away, Charlie. Come Maud!" and she turned to go.

There were no tears or vain beseechings. Maud and Charlie Eden followed their aunt to the school-room without a murmur, though the little people's faces certainly lengthened somewhat on the way.

It was a very pleasant room, light and commodious, with the soft rays of an autumnal sun shining

in cheerfully through the large bow-window upon the walls, hung with maps, pictures, and illuminated mottoes: mottoes after Aunt Harriet's own heart, inculcating obedience, industry, and order, and which, from being read and quoted so frequently had become quite household words among the little scholars. It was not untenanted when the two children entered. At the table sat a girl of about thirteen years of age,—blue-eyed, fair-haired, rosy-cheeked,—Maud's eldest sister, but as unlike her as possible; and on the floor stretched out seemingly much at his ease, lay a boy a year or two older,—pale and delicate-looking, with great black eyes, which had the dim misty look of one absorbed in reverie, instead of being intent upon the book which he held in his hand. From the window might be seen a little yellow-haired maiden, tripping about in the garden with an air of exulting freedom, which made Charlie's heart throb with envy. This was the pet and plaything of the flock,—a six years old child, to whom lessons were as yet only a name, since her studies were confined to spelling cat, "tat," and dog, "dod," out of a large picture spelling-book, under Aunt Anna's superintendence.

"Cissy, have you heard the news? Rafe, have you heard the news? Aunt Harriet, mayn't I go into the garden and tell Baby?" It was thus that Charlie broke in upon the quiet of the school-room; but Cissy shook her head at him, and went on with her rule-of-three sum, without a word. It

was one of Aunt Harriet's decrees that no unnecessary talk should be allowed during lesson-time; and good Cissy, in unquestioning submission, rendered honourable obedience, to the very letter of the law, and was never persuaded or surprised into opening her rosy mouth to give utterance to anything that had not to do with her lessons.

Rafe was not so particular. "Do you mean about cousin Adele's coming, Charlie?" he inquired, raising himself on one elbow, with a kind of languid interest.

"Yes, he does mean that," interrupted his aunt, "but we must have no talk now. Charlie, bring me your geography book. Maud, here is a copy set,—try to take more pains with your writing than you did yesterday."

Maud took the book, with a timid "Yes, Aunt Harriet," and the little party set to work as diligently as if their cousin Adele had never been heard of. It was enough to make any one feel industrious to look at Harriet Eden, with her handsome face bright with intelligence and energy, while her busy hands mended pens and cut pencils, and her quick eye glanced over the sums and exercises brought up for inspection, and detected in an instant the faults of each.

Under the influence of one of her quietly disapproving glances, Rafe rose from his lounging position, and took a chair, but he did not apply himself with much diligence to his book. He was of an age at which he ought to have been at school, and

would have been, but that weakness in his spine, (the result of an accident,) and general ill health, had made him too fragile a creature to be trusted to the care of strangers. The retired village in which his grandmother lived, offered but few advantages for education, but one of the masters of the Grammar School at the nearest town came over three times a week to instruct him in classics and mathematics; and for the rest, his aunt was quite capable of being his teacher, as she was both clever and well educated. Unfortunately, Rafe had a fancy that it was not dignified to be taught by a woman, and accordingly gave as much trouble as possible: learning nothing well but what happened to suit his taste, and excusing his indolence on the score of ill-health, and his inattention to his patient instructress, on the grounds that "she was only nine years older than himself, and had no business to order him about as if he were a baby."

Poor boy! He had lost both father and mother. His father, a gallant Line officer, had died in Canada when he was but nine years old, and his mother, a gentle, delicate Canadian girl, had survived her husband's loss but a few months, and then withered away, leaving her five orphan children to be brought home under the care of strangers, to the quiet village in the south of England where their father's young days had been spent, and where his mother and sisters still continued to live.

There in the peaceful monotony of a country life

five years had passed tranquilly away, and Rafe was now fifteen, as full of restless aspirations as most boys of that age, and rendered discontented by the feeling that his delicate health and weakly frame might for ever debar him from taking that active part in the world after which his brave spirit pined.

Cissy, or more properly Cecilia, though next to him in age, was not much of a companion for him. Simple-minded, straightforward, unromantic, and by no means clever, she did not form the most agreeable confidante for a sensitive, dreamy, talented boy, half of whose thoughts and imaginings she could not in the least understand. And yet he was her pride and delight, the one person whom most of all she cared for; the one whom in her innocent partiality she thought the handsomest, and cleverest, and most charming of all the boys in the world. She never expected to be first with him as he was with her; she was content to nurse and pet him when he was ill, to wait upon him at all times, to bear patiently with his little petulant ways, and to be told in return that "she was hopelessly dull, and that there was no use in telling her anything."

Little Maud had all the confidences; 'great secrets,' 'capital plans,' 'new ideas,' were all poured into her willing ear; and though she was but just twelve, she too had plans and dreams, and was never tired of listening to Rafe's attempts at poetry, or of helping him to concoct wonderful stories which some day were to be printed and

published—so said Rafe—and to sell for unheard of sums of money.

Charlie and little Dora or 'Baby,' as she was often called, were naturally, from their age, excluded from any participation in these ambitious undertakings; and though Aunt Anna was occasionally allowed a peep at Rafe's manuscripts, they were hidden away from Aunt Harriet as carefully as if she had been the Grand Inquisitor. As for grandmamma, dear kind grandmamma, she had once and only once been treated with the sight of one of Rafe's compositions, and had pronounced that 'too newfangled and misty,' recommending Dr. Johnson to him as a model for style.

The lessons lasted a good while, and then Aunt Harriet looking at her watch, pronounced it twelve o'clock, and time to get ready for walking. The books were put away, neatly and tidily, for did not the motto over the mantelpiece inculcate neatness and order? and was not Aunt Harriet there to enforce attention to the precept?

Then the children ran to put on their walking apparel, and their aunt followed with quieter footsteps, looking in at the drawing-room on her way to say a cheerful word to her mother, who was seated in an arm-chair, busily knitting, while Anna read aloud to her from some of her favourite old books.

Rafe secured Maud as his companion during the walk, Dora and Charlie ran on in front, bowling their hoops, and Cissy walked demurely at her

aunt's side, trying *not* to wish to be racing about with the little ones, instead of 'behaving properly, and like a young lady.' Not that it was any penalty to walk with Aunt Harriet, for Cissy dearly loved these quiet conversations on books, people and things, from which she declared she learned more than from all her lessons put together; but there was a spice of the romp in her composition, and she felt as if one good race would freshen her up, and disperse the mental mists which two hours' arithmetic and French grammar had left in her innocent brain.

"I suppose you expect to like Adele very much, don't you, Maud?" Rafe inquired, as soon as they had got far enough in front to be out of their aunt's hearing; adding before Maud could reply, "From what I hear of her, I think she would make rather a good heroine for one of my stories, and I am glad she is coming on that account, for I know so little about girls that I am often puzzled how to describe my heroines; I can't make them all like you, and I know no one else who is at all romantic."

If this remark had been addressed to Cissy, she would have been lost in astonishment that Rafe's chief satisfaction in the prospect of seeing an unknown cousin should arise from such a cause, but Maud considered it perfectly natural.

"You can make her marry your crusading knight, Rafe," she said, "you have not given him any ladylove yet."

Rafe looked unutterable scorn. "My crusading knight! Rodolph de Saumarez do you mean? The idea of his marrying anybody! Why I thought I told you, Maud, that he was one of the Knights of Saint Mary who were vowed to celibacy; marry indeed!"

Maud apologized humbly for her unintentional insult to the character of the sublime Rodolph, and went on to say that perhaps Adele would help them in making their stories.

"I don't know about that," was the reply, "you must take care how you tell her about our pursuits, Maud; perhaps, after all, she may be a matter-of-fact little thing, not original or intellectual at all."

"Are *we* intellectual?" said Maud, astonished. "I thought only grown up people could be that, like Aunt Harriet or Mr. Churchill."

Rafe gave his head an impatient toss. "How often am I to tell you that Aunt Harriet is not so very much older than I am? Why should not we be intellectual, pray?"

"I don't know exactly, only"—and a sweet blush dyed the child's fair cheek—"I don't want to be vain, and fancy myself different from other children; and I am quite sure Cissy would not like to be called 'intellectual.'"

"Cissy! no, I should think not, indeed! Cissy will never be intellectual if she lives to be a hundred: you have twice as much mind as she has, although you are younger."

"Perhaps—I suppose you know best ; but Rafe, I would give all my 'mind,' as you call it, to be as good as Cissy is. Mr. Lascelles is learned and wise, and likes people to be clever ; but I know, for all that, he is much better pleased with Cissy than with me, and likes her answers at the catechisings much the best, although they are so short, and she says them so slow."

"That's hardly fair of him, then, for you answer beautifully. I heard Aunt Anna say so, and I think so myself. You have such a good memory, and you use such nice words."

"It isn't nice words that make the answers nice, though," Maud replied : "it's good thoughts coming out of a good heart ; and Cissy is so good."

Rafe gave a mute assent, for he knew that what Maud said was true. They were both far beyond Cissy in talent : they were handsomer, more agreeable, but she was better than they were,—really better,—and that after all is the great point.

"I shouldn't wonder if Adele isn't half as good as you, Maud," said Rafe, presently, in a tone which rather implied satisfaction than otherwise. "Grandmamma says that, like most only children, she has been rather spoiled. How old is she?"

"Just thirteen ; and Uncle William describes her as very small for her age, but at the same time womanly looking. I am so anxious to see her ; but I know I shan't like her, unless she is a great deal better than I am."

Rafe gave a long whistle, intended to express

doubt in Adele's perfections; and then inquired how soon it was thought she could arrive.

"Next week. We don't quite know what day, because it depends on the lady who is going to take charge of her on the journey. Uncle William and Aunt Therese are going with her as far as Boulogne. Shouldn't you like to see Boulogne, Rafe, where that dear Godfrey once lived?"

"Shouldn't I!" replied Rafe; "I would rather be anywhere than here. I don't believe there is such another stupid place in the world. I wish Uncle Eden would ask me to go home with Adele when she returns, and stay some time. I do so long to see Amiens, where Peter the Hermit was born, you know; and some other places—Grenoble, for instance, where Bayard was buried, and oh! fifty more that I could name: and here I am stuck down in this dull little hole. Oh, dear!" And he positively groaned.

"I am very sorry," said Maud sympathizingly; "but you know, dear Rafe, you promised to try not to be discontented, and indeed it's very pleasant here. I am almost always happy, and should be happier still if you were."

She glanced up as she spoke to the beautiful wood glorious in its autumn foliage, which skirted one side of the road along which they were walking; then higher still to the blue sky, with its floating, pearly clouds; and then down once more on the peaceful hill and dale country, which stretched away to their right hand for miles and miles. The

calm sunshine of the autumn day seemed reflected in her innocent face.

Rafe followed the direction of her eyes, but his countenance did not brighten as hers had done. "It's pretty, I grant," he said grudgingly; "but tame, tame. Give me some wild mountain pass, like those in Mr. Churchill's sketch book, or some noble giant forest such as we used to see in Canada. You don't remember much about that, I suppose, Maud, but I do. Sometimes in my dreams I fancy myself floating down the St. Lawrence, with those glorious woods on either hand, as I saw them one autumn six years ago."

"The solemn woods of ash deep crimsoned
And silver beech and maple yellow leaved,
Where Autumn like a faint old man sits down
By the wayside a-weary,"

quoted Maud, from her favourite Longfellow.

"Pray go on," said Rafe, laughing, "let us have the piece Aunt Harriet so much admires.

'Oh what a glory doth this world put on
For him who, with a fervent heart, goes forth
Under the bright and glorious sky, and looks
On duties well performed, and days well spent !'

She might have written that herself, it's so moral and proper."

"Now, Rafe," said Maud, lifting up one tiny finger in sign of disapproval.

"Very well, Mrs. Propriety," he answered impatiently; "but don't look so unnecessarily solemn

or I shall begin to think you are getting as particular and tiresome as the rest of the world."

Maud's only reply was a smile, arch and sweet, as though defying him to think her tiresome, look as she might. It was not without its effect; for he presently patted her on the shoulder, and saying, "Come, come, I must not quarrel with my only confederate," thus brought the subject to a conclusion, to his own and her satisfaction.



CHAPTER II.

ADELE.

"Who will have a game at battledore and shuttlecock this wet afternoon?" said Aunt Anna, as she stood at the drawing-room window watching the falling rain, while a little *sotto voce* grumbling went on among her nieces and nephews, occasioned partly by the weather, partly by the uncertainty as to their cousin Adele's arrival, though the week of expectation was over and the appointed day had come.

"I, and I, and I," answered the young voices, all but Rafe's, which was silent, as indeed it usually was, when any active sport was proposed.

"Whoever likes may come with me into the passage," their aunt went on. "Won't you come, Rafe? It would do you a great deal of good."

"Yes, go, Rafe," said Aunt Harriet, looking up from her work; "you have not had any exercise to-day; and you need not think yourself too old for the sport when Anna sets you the example."

Rafe went, but not with a very good grace ; and his slow awkward movements were a great contrast to his young aunt's graceful dexterity. She evidently quite enjoyed the game, and excitement sent such a beautiful rosy flush into her fair cheek, that Rafe and Maud stopped sometimes in their play to cast admiring looks at her. She challenged Cissy to a trial of skill as to which of them could keep the shuttlecock flying longest, and little Dora, whose own attempts at the game were very feeble, quite clapped her hands with glee at seeing Aunt Anna flying along the passage, tossing up her feathery plaything to the ceiling, and catching it again on her battledore with a consummate ease which none but Cissy could hope to be able to imitate.

Amid the laughter and amusement caused by the game, the sound of a carriage driving up, and a low knock at the front door, was unheeded ; and all were astonished when footsteps were heard ascending the stairs, and a stranger appeared upon the scene. A tiny figure, with an odd kind of womanliness about it, dressed in the extreme of French fashion,—a small oval face, with dark hair drawn off from it ‘ *à l’Imperatrice*,’ and lit up by a pair of very brilliant brown eyes,—that was what Anna saw as she dropped her battledore, and hastened towards the intruder.

“ *Est-ce que je vois ma tante Anna ?*” said the little creature, holding out her hand, and looking with unfeigned astonishment at the flushed, mirth-

ful face of the pretty girl advancing so frankly towards her.

"The same. And you are Adele, I am sure," was the answer accompanied by a very cordial embrace.

"Oh oui! yes, I mean. And these are my cousins?"

"Yes, this is Rafe, and this is Cissy, Maud, Charlie, Dora; now you see them all."

There was a shower of kisses, and then Anna took Adele's hand, and led her into the drawing-room. Grandmamma and Aunt Harriet welcomed her as kindly, though not quite as rapturously as the younger ones, and after awhile Cissy proposed to take her up stairs to remove her wraps.

Miss Eden and her sister smiled at the contrast between the two children as they re-entered the room; Cissy, though really a few months the elder, looking such a child in her plain merino frock, with her yellow hair in tight curls round her head; while Adele, with her flounced dress, and fashionably arranged locks, looked as Charlie observed, "like a little old woman cut shorter." But the other children soon agreed that they would far rather have their dear good Cissy for a sister, than this most stylish little lady. They did not know what to make of her, with her foreign appearance and accent, her assured manner, and total freedom from shyness. She chattered away to their grandmamma about her papa and mamma, told a hundred anecdotes of her voyage, and of the friends who had

taken care of her on the way ; using French in her most animated descriptions, greatly to the chagrin of Charlie and Dora, to whom Greek would have been almost as intelligible. She had dined, she said, on her journey, and persisted in refusing all substantial refreshment, though quite ready for a little dip into grandmamma's bonbon box ; her assumed dignity not being able to hold out against her thoroughly French partiality for "confitures."

She was not tired, she was never tired, she affirmed, and when Maud by and by proposed to show her the house, she professed herself quite anxious to see it.

It was a curious rambling old mansion, with all sorts of queer ins and outs that no one would have suspected, and Adele quite delighted Maud and Charlie who had undertaken to be her cicerones, by her eager exclamations of "Ah que c'est drôle !" "Ah que c'est charmant !" as they led her up and down the odd little flights of stairs that occurred at the most impossible places, or pointed out to her the curious oak carving in the dining room, and the hall, and the Eden crest emblazoned on some of the windows.

When they came to the schoolroom, she seemed inclined to stay there a little while, and established herself in a graceful attitude, on one of the old-fashioned highbacked chairs which stood at each side of the fireplace ; while Maud well pleased to have the opportunity of a tête à tête, (for Charlie deserted them at this juncture, and stole up stairs

again to have a few confidential words with Aunt Anna,) drew a low stool to her side, and prepared to chatter in her turn. Adele glanced up at the well filled book shelves near her, and murmuring to herself, "Maitland's Dark Ages," "The Broad Stone of Honour," "L'Histoire du Chevalier Bayard," "History of the Crusades;" exclaimed aloud "Oh what dull books! Do you read nothing more amusing than those, *chere cousine*?"

"We have story books and some volumes of poems," Maud replied, a little perplexed at the epithet of 'dull' being bestowed on what she thought so interesting. "That row of books that you are looking at belongs to Rafe, he likes reading about the middle ages better than anything, and so do I, almost."

"C'est étonnant! but I suppose you are both very clever and wise, and have been brought up to like the dry books. Tell me, what do you do all the day? Is not your life very triste?"

"Oh no, no, we're very happy indeed," exclaimed Maud eagerly. "All but Rafe, and then you know *he* is so often ill. We do lessons every morning, and go for a walk unless it rains, except on Wednesdays and Fridays, and Saints' days, when we go to church in the morning, and walk in the afternoon. On other afternoons we work, while some one reads aloud, and we practise, at least Cissy and I do, and in the hour before tea we play games or chat together. Then in the evening we work too sometimes, and sometimes we sing

easy songs, you know, and now and then Aunt Harriet plays for us, and we all dance, and Aunt Anna with us."

"And have you no parties? Do no visitors come?"

"No, we seldom have parties, except that now and then, as on Christmas Day, for instance, Mr. Lascelles, our rector, and old Mr. Nicholls, our doctor, come to dinner; and Mr. Churchill too, but then *he* comes at other times, often he spends the evening with us, and then he draws funny pictures, and sings beautiful songs, and tells merry stories, and is oh! so nice and kind!"

"Is his name Arthur?" asked Adele, with some interest, "I think I have heard papa mention him often as 'Arthur Churchill,' he lives somewhere in the village, does he not?"

"Yes, he is what the poor people call 'the Squire,' and he lives in such a great house, 'Churchill Abbots' it is called; you know the name of our village is Abbotsbrook, and Mr. Churchill says there is an old legend about an Abbot ages and ages ago, passing through here when there were nothing but a few scattered huts in the place, and he was very tired and so was his mule, and they both wanted water very badly, and could not find any, so the Abbot knelt down and prayed, and a little brook gushed out as clear as crystal beside him, and that is how the village got its name. This happened in what used to be a field, but is now Mr. Churchill's park, and the poor people always

called it Abbot's field, or 'Abbots' for short, so when some Mr. Churchill many years ago built that grand house, and laid out the park, he adopted the name, and called it 'Churchill Abbots.' Don't you like hearing those old stories about names?"

Adele's yawn said no; even more emphatically than her careless "not particularly, tell me more about Mr. Churchill himself; is he married?"

"No, oh no, why should you think so? he is not old at all, only a year or two older than Aunt Harriet. His father and mother are dead, and he has no brothers and sisters, so that I should think he would be very lonely, if it were not for Aunt Harriet, but she is just like a sister to him."

Adele gave a look of indéscribable archness, and asked when she should be likely to see him.

"Not for some time, he is not here now, he is travelling in Germany. I daresay you will soon see his uncle, Mr. Lascelles, at church, and I am sure you will like him, for he is so good and kind. He has catechisings at the church on Sunday afternoons and saints' days, and we always stand up to be catechised with the other children; shall you like that, do you think?"

Adele raised her eyebrows at this question, and slightly shrugged her shoulders. "There was nothing like that at Amiens," she said, "and we never went to church except on Sundays; and some of the people there go every day."

"So do many people in England," Maud replied, "Aunt Harriet says it is very right."

"Cela peut-être," said Adele indifferently, "but tell me, is Aunt Harriet very strict? Papa said she kept you all in such order."

Maud laughed, and looked a little doubtful how to answer. "I hardly know," she said at last. "Rafe says so; but she is very *very* good to us; we love her so much, and she takes such trouble about us all. I heard Mr. Churchill say once to grandmamma that she was just like a mother to us."

Again that arch meaning smile gleamed out of Adele's brown eyes, but before she could speak Charlie came running in. "I have been up in the drawing-room," he said, "and they asked what you were about, so I said, telling secrets, for I know girls always tell secrets when they are left alone together."

Adele laughed, but Maud flushed up, and began rather an angry reply. "I hate secrets," she exclaimed, indignantly, "they are so mean. It was very naughty of you, Charlie, to say we were telling secrets."

"Who keeps all Rafe's?" asked Charlie, mischievously.

Maud looked discomfited, but rejoined that that was quite different, as Rafe's were "nice, good secrets, and of great importance."

"And so may yours have been 'nice, good secrets, and of great importance,'" mimicked Charlie, with a boy's love of tormenting.

"I have no secrets," was the indignant answer; "I was only telling Adele all we do in the day."

"All the stories we write when Aunt Harriet is not by," said the provoking little fellow.

Maud darted an angry glance at him, and seemed about to return some passionate reply; when, as if struck by a sudden remembrance, her eyes drooped, and she pressed her lips tightly together without uttering a word.

"Soyez doux," said Adele, coaxingly, to Charlie, patting with her little hand his curly head, as he crouched on the hearthrug beside her. He didn't understand her in the least, but smiled, and jumping up, gave her a kiss.

Maud took this opportunity to run away for a minute, and, as Charlie expressed it, "cool down."

"She isn't like Cissy," he remarked, in a confidential tone, when she was gone; "Cissy is never angry, say what you will."

"But you are very *méchant*, very tiresome," said Adele; "poor little Maud!"

"She is not little; she is almost as old as you," Charlie returned.

"She seems little," was his cousin's reply. "I am accustomed to be with grown up people; I like grown up people best."

"Is that why you try to make yourself look grown up?" bluntly inquired Charlie, in his bluff, downright fashion.

Adele was astonished at the question, but only tossed her little head by way of reply.

"I was talking to Maud about my aunts," she

said, presently ; " I asked her if she thought Aunt Harriet strict."

" Did she say yes ? Oh, I hope she did !"

" No ; she said she did not know. What do you think ?"

" Don't tell," said Charlie, putting his face close to hers ; " it is quite a secret, as much so as any girl's ; but I *do* think Aunt Harriet is strict, *very* strict. Do you know, I said so once to Mr. Churchill. I thought he would not believe it, but I suppose he did ; for he laughed, and said he was glad to hear it : he was sure it must be necessary."

" Which do you like best ?" questioned Adele ; " Aunt Harriet, or Aunt Anna ?"

" Oh, Aunt Anna, Aunt Anna. Aunt Harriet is handsome, and good, and all that ; but Aunt Anna is *such a dear*."

" I love Aunt Harriet just as much," said Maud, who returned in time to hear the last remark ; " and so, I think, will you, Adele, when you learn to know them. They are both very good themselves ; but Aunt Harriet helps other people to be good better than Aunt Anna."

" Who has helped you to be good, now ?" asked Adele, with such a sweet, affectionate smile, that Maud kissed her gratefully as she answered,

" It was something that Aunt Harriet has taught me that helped me : I am very sorry I was cross before." Adding, as she turned towards her brother, " Kiss me, Charlie, dear, and say you forgive me."

Charlie thought in his secret heart that he needed Maud's forgiveness quite as much as she did his; but he was not so candid in confessing his faults as she was, and so only kissed her warmly, and called her "a dear old thing."

Her little fit of ill humour had quite vanished: the only trace of it remaining was a rather shame-faced look in her sweet, ingenuous eyes,—a look which Aunt Harriet, who at that moment entered the room to summon the children to an early tea, was at no loss to understand.

As she stood a moment by the fire, smiling down at Adele, before disturbing her from her comfortable position, Maud came close up to her, leaned her soft head against her, and took possession of her hand. Not a word passed between them; only a warm pressure from the hand she held told the little girl that she was understood. Penitence always made Maud clinging, and Aunt Harriet had learnt to interpret the story which those shy, mute caresses were meant to tell.

When nothing was the matter, Maud would sport round her grandmamma or her Aunt Anna, bestowing on them innumerable kisses and loving speeches, which Miss Eden's undemonstrative nature would have shrunk from as superfluous; but when any act of disobedience, or outbreak of quick temper, had grieved the child's tender conscience, it was always to Aunt Harriet that she turned, with confessions sometimes uttered, sometimes, as in this case, silent.

Adele, who was remarkably observant, had noticed Maud's simple action, and also the tender, sympathising expression which stole at the same moment into her aunt's bright eyes. The deep and quiet affection and confidence thus unconsciously betrayed startled and touched the lively little French girl (for French she was to the heart's core, spite of an English surname, and a most thoroughly English father) ; so that for a moment she forgot all that a too indulgent mother had told her of her aunt's arbitrary rule and uncompromising strictness, and began to think that her intended six months' stay at Abbotsbrook might not prove so miserable as she had anticipated.

The rest of the day passed happily away in work, and talk, and music. Adele astonished her cousins by the performance (from memory) of a showy piece by the most brilliant of French composers,—so full of shakes, runs, and intricate chords, that Cissy's hair almost stood on end while listening to it, and she felt half ashamed of the simple arrangement of the "Bluebells of Scotland," which she had been accustomed to play with so much satisfaction, and which grandmamma would insist on asking for directly after.

Rafe and Charlie sang "Bonnie Dundee" as a duet with infinite spirit, though with more noise than melody, at least so far as Charlie's part in it was concerned.

Even Dora chirped out, in a sweet, faint little voice, the time-honoured ditty of "Little Bo Peep,"

receiving with an incredulous smile Adele's offer of teaching her the French version of it, and stoutly refusing to accept

“Petit Bo Bouton a perdu ses moutons,
Et ne sait pas qui les a pris ;
Laissez les tranquille et ils viendront en ville,
Et chacun sa queue après lui,”

as anything but a most barbarous imitation of “her dear *English* Bo Peep.”

Maud alone hung back, though her brothers and sisters eagerly begged her to sing their favourite “Cruden Dhoo;” and Rafe explained to Adele that this strangely named song was a plaintive little Scotch melody, which Mr. Churchill had taught her, and which she sang with so much expression, that Dora habitually cried over it, and even grandmamma had been known to wipe her eyes at the conclusion. Blushingly the beautiful child bent over her work, her lips quivering with timidity at the idea of singing to a fresh auditor, even though it was but her own little cousin. Adele was beginning to think her childish and absurd, when the mandate, “Maud, go and sing directly,” came forth in Aunt Harriet's clear tones, and she passed instantly to the piano, trembling still, but apparently so convinced that it must be done, as to attempt no further opposition.

“ ‘ Oh, where ha' ye been the livelang day,
My little wee Cruden Dhoo ?’
‘ I ha'e been to see my stepmither.
Mammy, mak' my bed noo.’ ”

“ ‘ And what did your stepmither gie ye to eat,
 My little wee Cruden Dhoo ?’
 ‘ She gave to me a wee wee fish,
 All covered wi’ green and blue.’

“ ‘ And what did ye do wi’ the bones o’ the fish,
 My little wee Cruden Dhoo ?’
 ‘ Oh, I gave them to my wee doggie,
 Mammy, mak’ my bed noo.’

“ ‘ And what did he do when he’d eat up the bones,
 My little wee Cruden Dhoo ?’
 ‘ Oh, he stretched his wee wee limbs and died,
 Mammy, as I do noo.’ ”

These words, set to the sweetest of sweet tunes, fell in soft melancholy cadence on Adele’s attentive ear. Maud’s voice, tremulous at first, swelled at the second verse into a full rich tone, and died away at the end into accents so soft, so melting, so pathetic, that no one wondered to see grandmamma’s spectacles bedimmed. Maud scarcely seemed to heed her cousin’s rather exaggerated thanks, though she crimsoned with pleasure at Aunt Harriet’s glance of approval, and gladly diverted attention from herself by drawing Adele’s notice to the song, explaining that “Mammy” was the nurse of the poor little poisoned child, and asking if she did not suspect the poisoning directly she heard of the suspicious green and blue appearance of the “wee wee fish?”

Altogether Adele spent a very pleasant evening, as she acknowledged to herself when she lay down

in bed that night. She would fain have imparted this opinion to Cissy, whose room she shared; but directly she opened her lips, that young lady informed her that Aunt Harriet did not allow of night conversations, and that they must talk in the morning.



CHAPTER III.

LIONIZING IN A SMALL WAY.

"Bon jour, Mademoiselle, vous ne vous levez pas de bonne heure apparemment," spouted Charlie in his worst of French accents, when Adele joined the breakfast party on the third morning after her arrival, at a much later hour than was usual with any of her cousins. He had culled this choice sentence from an old book of French dialogues, and now levelled it exultingly at the lazy little culprit, who no way discomfited darted at him a glance of somewhat affected disdain, and after a polite "good morning" to her aunts took her place at the table.

She had been very late indeed the first morning, but that was easily attributable to the fatigue arising from the long journey ; the second day she had been a trifle earlier, but on this third day she had resisted all Cissy's endeavours to rouse her, and had not even risen from her bed, till her cousin was dressed and had gone down. The breakfast

was almost over by the time she made her appearance, and her coffee would have been quite cold, if her aunt had not considerately kept it warm by the fire for her.

"But I warn you," said Aunt Harriet, smiling, as she filled the cup which Adele extended to her, "that after this week I shall not keep your coffee warm for you any longer; we all rise early here, except grandmamma (unless we are ill), and any one who comes down late pays the penalty of having to drink cold coffee and tea."

"And worse than that," exclaimed Charlie, with naïve dolefulness.

"Ah, Charlie is thinking of the delicious breakfast he made off dry bread a month ago," said Aunt Anna mischievously; "you really effected a cure that day, Harriet; for Charlie has never been late since; before—"

"Hush!" said her sister, interposing to spare the little fellow's blushes; "we must not tell tales out of school you know, Anna."

But unabashed, Charlie broke in, "Oh, you need not mind, I don't care for any one knowing that I hate dry bread. I wonder what Adele would say if she came down some fine morning and found a hunch of it in her plate, with nothing in her cup but a little cold milk and water."

To judge by Adele's face, such a prospect was far from pleasant to her; and Aunt Harriet hastened to relieve her fears by saying, "You need not be afraid of getting such fare, Adele, I reserve it

for those who seem almost incurable, and you I am sure will soon cure yourself of any little disposition to be lazy, will you not?"

Adele muttered something that was scarcely assent, and a little shadow stole into her aunt's bright eyes; but she sipped her tea thoughtfully and made no remark.

"Aunt Haddedet" (such was Dora's pronunciation of this name,) "eat de d'y b'ead herself one morning, and s'e didn't comp'ain."

Adele suspended the process of buttering her roll in sheer astonishment, and Maud explained in a whisper:

"Aunt Harriet once, only *once*, came down late for breakfast,"—(she had been sitting up half the night writing,)—"and, as Dora says, she just took a little bit of dry bread, and a cup of milk and water, and made her breakfast off that as composedly as possible."

"Aunt did not dislike it, I dare say," added Rafe; "and she never preaches what she don't practise."

Adele looked at her as if she were a kind of moral phenomenon, and her curiosity (of which she had a large share) being satisfied, went on leisurely with her breakfast.

"If it keeps fine, Aunt Harriet," said Cissy after a pause, "may we go to the Infant School this morning? You would like to see the dear little children, wouldn't you, Adele?"

"If *you* like," said Adele indifferently.

"Take Adele to see the Church," said Maud

with eagerness ; " I am sure she would like that, it is so beautiful."

Adele smiled. " I don't suppose it is to be compared to the churches on the Continent," she said patronizingly ; " but I will come with you to see it if you like, *chérie*."

" I must not go," was the hesitating answer ; " but Cissy will take you."

" Why may not you ?" questioned Adele, all astonishment.

" Because Mr. Lascelles has forbidden me," said Maud blushing crimson ; and before another " why" could leave Adele's lips, she added hurriedly, " I am not allowed to go into the Church except in service time, because when I helped to decorate it last Easter I forgot where I was, and behaved crossly to Charlie."

It was with great effort that she said this, for it was the first time that she had ever voluntarily alluded to this very sore subject ; and somehow her lips *would* quiver, and hot tears would rise to her eyes. Both her aunts seemed to feel for her, and Aunt Anna looked quickly up, saying, " Don't you think the interdict might be removed now, Harriet ? Surely the poor child's penance has been long enough, and no one can doubt that she is sorry for her fault. I have always thought that our good King Arthur behaved rather barbarously upon that occasion."

Adele pricked up her ears (figuratively speaking) at the mention of this name, which she had already

learnt to know as Aunt Anna's pet sobriquet for Mr. Churchill; but Miss Eden only answered the first part of the speech.

"I think it is Mr. Lascelles who ought to give the permission," she said.

"Oh! I dare say he has forgotten all about it," rejoined Anna; "he would never have taken up the matter so seriously if Mr. Churchill had not put it into his head, and—but I must stop, for Cissy looks ready to eat me for having said a word against her favourite."

"Oh, Aunt Anna, I beg your pardon for looking so, I did not mean to, I'm sure," said Cissy earnestly: and Anna could well believe it, for to say the truth, it was not Cissy's looks, but a reproachful glance from her sister which had stopped her.

"Aunt Harriet," said Maud, very timidly, "do you think I might soon ask Mr. Lascelles to forgive me, and let me go into the Church again when I like?"

"I think I would wait till after Christmas if I were you," replied her aunt, gently, but decidedly. "If you bear well seeing the others allowed to deck the Church while you are excluded, that will be the best proof that you are sorry for your fault, and deserve to have it forgotten."

"How cruel!" thought Adele to herself; "she is so very harsh to that poor little Maud."

But apparently Maud herself did not think so, for she turned her sweet face towards her Aunt in

patient acquiescence, and stretched out her little hand, which was taken and pressed affectionately.

"Why do you all make such a fuss about being allowed to go into the Church?" asked Adele of Cissy when breakfast was over, and the elder children were all grouped together round the fire; "I don't see any great treat in that."

"But it is a disgrace to be excluded," answered Cissy gravely; "and when I go now I always feel sad because Maud is not with me."

"And all because of that meddlesome Mr. Churchill," exclaimed Rafe angrily.

"Please don't say that, *dear* Rafe," pleaded Maud, "you will make me tell Adele how it was;" and turning to her cousin, she said, "Our aunts were not with us that day, grandmamma was ill, and they did not like to leave her, so Mr. Churchill had the charge of us, and Aunt Harriet begged us all to be very good. I quite meant to be; I liked being in the Church and helping to decorate so much at first; but then Mr. Churchill went a good way off from me, and I forgot and began to play tricks with Charlie; at last he snatched one of my bunches of evergreens from me, and declared he would not give it back again, and then I got very angry, and began to scold him, and just at that moment Mr. Churchill came up and asked who it was speaking so loudly and angrily."

"And did you tell him?" asked Adele.

"Did she, indeed?" said Rafe; "you would not have asked that question if you had known Maud

longer: of course she did, took all the blame on herself, and never said a word about Charlie."

"Oh! that would have been unkind," Maud answered quietly. "Of course I only said it was I, and then Mr. Churchill looked very sorry, and told me he could not let me stay in the Church as I was so naughty, but would take me to the Rectory, where I must stay till the others were ready to go home. So there I passed the whole afternoon, and I was oh, so miserable. Mr. Churchill gave me a hymn from the 'Lyra Innocentium' to learn, one called 'Irreverence in Church;' but at first I was so unhappy that I could scarcely take in the sense of it."

"No wonder," said Adele indignantly; "and did they leave you all alone?"

"Not quite; at least Mr. Lascelles' housekeeper came in and out to look at the fire, and see if I wanted anything; she saw I was in disgrace, and tried to console me, for she is a nice kind old woman: but nothing she said could comfort me much, because she talked as if I was only grieving about being punished, when really I was crying for having been so naughty."

"And where was Mr. Lascelles?"

"Busy somewhere in the village at first, and afterwards I believe he went to the Church to help the decorating. I did not see him till quite late in the afternoon, and then he and Mr. Churchill came in together and I had to say my hymn; and then Mr. Lascelles spoke to me and told me, oh!"

—and Maud's composure fairly broke down—"that he would not trust me in the Church again except in service time."

"How horrid!" exclaimed Adele with a tragic uplifting of her hands and eyes. "Don't tell me any more such dreadful things, or I shall wish myself back at Amiens with *chère maman*; she would not scold, even if I did get a little cross in Church."

"Then I think she cannot be good," said Maud severely; "good people are vexed when others do wrong."

"And put them *en pénitence*, and give them hymns to learn, and make them cry their poor little eyes out," said Adele mockingly.

Cissy and Maud both looked indignant.

"Take care, Adele," said Rafe condescendingly. "My little sisters will set you down for a heathen." Adele laughed a light heartless laugh, and Cissy, who felt a slight antipathy to her cousin stealing over her, and did not wish to yield to it, hastened to change the subject.

"What will you like to do after all, Adele?" said she. "You have seen all our pictures, and books, and things, shall I ask Aunt Harriet to lend you her portfolio of drawings to look over, or will you like to come out?"

"Oh! to come out I think, as it is so fine just now. Suppose we go and see that wonderful Church you talk of."

Cissy felt a great repugnance to this plan; she did not like their cherished village Church (lately

restored at Mr. Churchill's expense,) to be paraded for Adele's careless criticism : to her the long shadowy aisles and radiant windows were something too beautiful and sacred to be even looked at lightly.

"We may as well go I think," interrupted Rafe, as she was about to speak ; "we need not stay in the Church long, and you must promise not to criticise till we come out, Adele. Don't be all day putting on your bonnets, girls, or we shall lose this bright gleam of sunshine."

"I will go with you," said Maud ; "for I can walk up and down the Rectory lane while you are in the Church, and afterwards we can all go on together."

"That is right," replied Adele, with the sweet smile that was her best ornament. "I like to have you with me, *chère petite*," and for the sake of the affectionate sentiment Maud forgave the patronizing tone.

They sallied forth together in a few minutes laughing and talking gaily ; Aunt Harriet's leave had been gained for their walk, and she confided the three girls to Rafe's particular care, saying she had some writing to do which would prevent her accompanying them.

Mrs. Eden's house stood a little way out of the village, and at the opposite end from the Church, so the little party had to traverse the whole length of the straggling village street before they reached their destination ; and Cissy much annoyed her

cousin by stopping sometimes on the way to speak to some poor old woman, or to kiss some chubby-faced baby, regardless of Rafe's gestures of disgust at the babies' dirty pinafores, and the old women's slow rambling manner of answering.

At length they turned into the Rectory lane, from whence the old grey Church with its taper spire was seen in its most picturesque aspect. Here the others bade a somewhat regretful farewell to Maud, who began to pace slowly up and down, pausing every now and then to look over the churchyard gate towards the ever open church-door, which seemed to invite her to enter.

Mr. Lascelles' kind old housekeeper saw her from the windows, and came down to the gate to speak to her.

"Dear Miss Maud," she said, "come in and see master: don't walk up and down there so lonesome."

"Oh, no, thank you, Mrs. Marlow; the others will be back soon, and I promised to wait here for them."

"But come in just for a minute, and have a piece of cake, and see the canaries," rejoined the good-natured old woman. "Mr. Churchill is going to bring master a Belgian canary, when he comes home from foreign parts. I hear say they're wonderful singers, those Belgian ones."

Maud was just going to repeat her thanks, and once more decline the invitation, when a tall, white-headed old gentleman appeared in the porch.

The housekeeper drew back with the exclamation "Here's master!" and Mr. Lascelles came and shook hands with Maud, and playfully stroked her pink cheeks.

"You look as fresh as a rose this morning," he said, smiling; "but why are you here all alone?"

"The others are gone into the Church," she answered in a low tone, a shy, distressed look stealing into her lovely eyes.

"And you are waiting for them? Well, come in and see the canaries: you haven't been to see them for a long time."

"Not since Easter," Maud answered, timidly.

"No; and has anything happened to you, my dear little maid? You gave me such a melancholy, frightened look as you said that."

"Don't you remember, sir?" replied she, blushing scarlet.

"I remember I had a little girl who was not very good in my study last Easter, whom I was obliged to scold; but all that is gone by now."

He smiled as he spoke; but Maud could not smile in return. She did not feel as if it were really all gone by, while the prohibition about the Church was still enforced. But for what her aunt had said, she would have supplicated for forgiveness then and there.

Mr. Lascelles' kind eyes were bent down, trying to read the piteous expression of the little face.

"I must have a talk with Aunt Harriet about you, and I think I shall hear a good report: shall I

not?" he said pleasantly. "But come in now, and let us find some lumps of sugar for the birds."

After being assured that Mrs. Marlow would keep watch upon the lane, and warn her when her companions came in sight, Maud at last accepted the invitation; and the canaries were much the gainers, for they got a lump of sugar, and innumerable "sweets," and "pretty dicks," from Maud's musical tongue.

Mr. Lascelles stood by silent for a minute or two, doling out the sugar, and watching how his pretty little visitor gradually lost her shyness in the pleasure of petting his feathered favourites. To say the truth, Maud was somewhat of a puzzle to him: he had first known her as a spoiled, wayward child, very lovely and engaging, but too forward and too confident in her own attractions to be quite pleasing to one who valued goodness far beyond any outward appearance. He had thought then that she needed careful checking, and he was only just beginning to see that this had been done so effectually during the five years she had been under Aunt Harriet's care, that it was now really encouragement which she needed most. The papa's and mamma's darling, whose faults were indulgently passed over, and whose beauty and grace had been hourly extolled, had during these five years been subjected to a far different discipline. Grandmamma and Aunt Anna would have spoiled her, if they could; but Aunt Harriet loved her too well to suffer this to be done, and

Maud had been trained by her in lowliness, humility, and self-denial, till, in the timid, humble-minded child of twelve, scarcely a trace was left of the capricious, self-confident little beauty, whose giddiness and vanity had once been so conspicuous. No one was more unconscious of the change than the child herself. She believed herself "very naughty" as firmly as she believed in anything; and it was the consciousness that Mr. Lascelles must think her so too, that gave her an even painful timidity in her manner to him.

"Which is Mr. Churchill's canary?" she said, looking up presently from her employment.

"The green one. He is not very sociable with the others, you see; I think he misses his master. Did you ever hear Arthur whistle tunes to him? It puts the little fellow in such a state of delight."

"Oh, I dare say," said Maud, smiling; "but I never heard him. Is Mr. Churchill coming home soon, do you think, sir?"

"In a few weeks, I hope; I shall be very glad to have him back."

"And so shall we," exclaimed Maud, with a beaming look.

"You have your little cousin with you now, have you not? What kind of little lady is she?"

"I can scarcely tell you, sir. She is pretty, I think, and clever; but we hardly seem to know her yet," Maud answered, confusedly.

"You have not found out all her good points,

and would rather not speak of her yet : is that it, eh ?”

“I hardly know ; but I don’t like her as well as I meant to. I think we are all a little disappointed ; we thought she would have been so very nice.”

Mr. Lascelles laughed. “Nice is a regular young lady’s word,” he said ; “I am sure Aunt Harriet does not teach you to say that.”

“No,” answered the child, blushing ; “and when I say it Aunt Anna laughs at me, and says, ‘Nice to eat, do you mean ?’ But I don’t know what word to use instead.”

Mr. Lascelles had no time to suggest one ; for at this moment Mrs. Marlow appeared, and announced that “Master Eden and the young ladies were coming down the lane.”

The Rector took his hat, and went out with Maud to meet them. He introduced himself to Adele, telling her he had known her father from a baby ; and Maud thought it was rather a scrutinising glance which he bestowed on her cousin as he spoke. Adele made him a very pretty little speech in return, saying she had often heard him mentioned with regard by her father ; and Maud half admired, half wondered at her ready self-possession.

“And now you are lionizing a little, I suppose,” said Mr. Lascelles. “There is not much to be seen at Abbotsbrook, I am afraid, except the Church. Where did you propose to go next ?”

"I thought we might go to the schools, if Adele liked," said Cissy, looking more towards her brother for assent.

"That will do as well as anything else, will it not, Adele?" he said, carelessly; and then turning towards Mr. Lascelles, added, "The girls have got a holiday for the rest of this week, and they hardly know what to do with themselves."

"Are you not taking a holiday too?" was the answer.

"Not exactly: Mr. Newman is coming over as usual this afternoon, and I have to prepare my Latin for him; so I must take care to be home in time." And Rafe consulted the watch with which his grandmamma had presented him on his last birthday.

"Have you begun to discover any of Mr. Newman's hidden excellencies yet?" asked the old gentleman somewhat mischievously.

Rafe shook his head. "He bores me dreadfully, sir: he does prose so about those old Greeks and Romans. The Spartans are his greatest favourites. He talks about their self-denial and simplicity of manners, and all the rest of it, till I long to set him down to black broth for life, as a punishment."

"And thereby make him a martyr to his opinions, than which he would like nothing better. He is a strange man, but there is a great deal of good in him, as you will find out some day when you get over your prejudice."

"I don't think it is prejudice," began Rafe ; but Mr. Lascelles cut short the discussion.

"If you will accept me as a companion, young ladies," he said, turning to the three little girls, "I will go with you to the schools, and we will see if we cannot treat Miss Adele to a little village music."

The children gave a delighted assent, and they set off towards the school-house, Cissy taking unopposed possession of one of Mr. Lascelles' hands. She was hardly tall enough to be able to take his arm quite comfortably, and besides she scarcely as yet aspired to such a dignity ; but she usually claimed the childish privilege of holding his hand, which he yielded, nothing loth ; for certainly if Mr. Lascelles had a pet, it was this blue-eyed Cissy, with her rosy smiling face, and frank affectionate ways.

The Infant School was the first visited, and Adele could not help being pleased with the chubby innocent-looking row of children, "all silence and all smiles," who performed such miracles of bowing and curtsy-bobbing, in acknowledgment of their visitors' presence. Mr. Lascelles was evidently a frequent and welcome guest, and Cissy and Maud scarcely less so ; but the little ones glanced shyly at Adele, and appeared quite awed by the look of severe dignity with which Rafe (who was no lover of children) regarded them.

While Mr. Lascelles nodded a salutation to the pupils, and said Good morning to the Mistress, Cissy flew up to one of the top benches, and be-

stowed quite a rapturous greeting on a little boy, whose extraordinary costume at once excited Adele's critical attention. He had on a little tight fur cap, tied close over his curls, a plaid frock almost down to his feet, and a woman's shawl of a sort of yellowish colour crossed over his chest, and tied round his waist in a huge knot; but spite of these curious habiliments he was a very pleasant looking little fellow, with blue eyes as round and large as Cissy's own.

"Oh, Miss Matthews," said Cissy, appealing to the Mistress, "do you think Johnnie ought to come to school this damp weather? I see he is well wrapped up, but he has a long way to go, and the afternoons get so soon cold and dark now."

The Mistress smiled as she answered, "I don't think he will take any harm, Miss Cecilia, he has been well a good while now, and his aunt is very careful of him; he has a cloak and a hat to put on when he goes out, besides what you see on him."

"Oh le petit monstre!" exclaimed Adele in an aside to Rafe.

"Hush!" he answered with ludicrous gravity, "don't let Cissy hear you for the world; that is her primest of favourites, her pet of pets, otherwise Johnny Andrews the carpenter's nephew."

Adele's reply was an expressive shrug.

"Well Johnnie, my little man," said Mr. Lascelles kindly to the child, "I am glad to see you in your place again. How is Fanny?"

"S'e's better, but s'e can't come to 'chool yet,"

lisped Johnnie, whose pronunciation was as obscure as Dora's.

"Ah I must come and see her then, and hear if she remembers her catechism and hymns. Do you think she does?"

"Yes," nodded the child, "yes, *sir*," he added, as an afterthought, with childish politeness.

"Are not you very hot in that shawl?" said Maud, with an expressive glance at the blazing fire near which he stood. To her surprise the little fellow almost cried at the question.

"I don't 'like it," he said, tugging at it for a moment as if to get it off; but relaxing his efforts almost immediately, he looked up, and added sweetly, "Aunt 'Becca said I was to wear it, 'like a good boy."

"Yes," said the Mistress, turning to Mr. Lascelles, "and Johnnie is very good about it, *sir*. Some of the other boys laugh at him, and call him 'scarecrow;' but he minds what his aunt said, and keeps on his wraps."

"Good boy," said Mr. Lascelles quietly, (though with a private resolution of remonstrating with Mrs. Andrews on such over-care,) while Cissy, in her delight at her favourite's good behaviour, could hardly restrain herself from giving him a kiss. Adele began to wonder whether Johnnie Andrews was to engross the whole conversation, but Mr. Lascelles presently turned to the mistress, saying, he should like to hear some of the children's songs. Accordingly a series of Infant School ditties were

executed very prettily, with accompanying gestures, such as beating time, clapping hands, &c.; and Adele, to whom the scene had at least the charm of novelty, was considerably more amused than she had expected to be.

By the time the other schools had been visited Rafe found it was getting late, and urged a speedy return home. Mr. Lascelles parted from them at the school-door, and went, as he said, to look after his people, while the quartette went through the manoeuvre known as "putting one's best foot foremost," and walked blithely homewards.

"Is not that little Johnny a dear good little boy?" said Cissy enthusiastically as they went along. "It must be so very hard for him to keep on those muffings when the other boys laugh at him."

"But it would be very naughty to take them off, when his aunt has bidden him wear them," replied Maud, who in theory was always unbending.

"You are very particular, Maud," laughed Adele; "do you mean to say you always attend to every fussy little order Aunt Harriet gives you?"

"Aunt Harriet is not fussy," began Maud indignantly; but Cissy interrupted with "Don't you remember, Maud, how we hated those little shawls which Aunt Harriet made us wear for a time when we were recovering from the measles?"

"Oh, those shawls!" exclaimed Rafe. "What little objects you used to look in them! Aunt Harriet had not an eye to the picturesque when

she muffled you up in those. They did not even possess the merit of being thoroughly grotesque like Johnny Andrews's costume."

"I remember, they were horrid," said Maud, with a little impatient movement of her shoulders, as if she still felt the burden of the obnoxious garment. "I grant now, Cissy, that Johnny Andrews is very good to wear his wraps so patiently; I remember I used to make a great fuss about mine then, though of course I should not do so now."

"No," said Adele, "you are quite *la bonne enfant* now; I suppose, if Mademoiselle ma tante were to bid you wear Grandmamma's cap and spectacles, you would say your 'yes, Aunt Harriet,' and put them on, would you not?"

Maud laughed heartily at the whimsical notion, and Rafe muttered to himself, "Unhesitating obedience is very captivating in theory."

Adele caught up the remark, and said sarcastically, "You would have admired those nuns that my uncle the Abbé told me about one day when we saw Philippe de Champaigne's picture 'Les Religieuses' at the Louvre; I forget what he called them, but I know their Superior's name was La mère Angelique, and all the nuns used to obey her orders implicitly, as if they had been babies."

"Oh, I know," exclaimed Maud, "the Port Royalists! don't laugh at them, Adele, they were so good, and, oh! so wonderfully submissive and obedient. Aunt Harriet told me about them once, and how one of them had a cell allotted to her in

which there was nothing but a heap of faggots, and without grumbling a bit she slept on the faggots, and waited patiently till a better bed was given her."

"More fool she!" said Rafe, for he observed it was only in *theory* that this young gentleman found implicit obedience captivating, and Maud was obliged to acknowledge that Aunt Harriet had said such unreasoning obedience was unnecessary and even weak in grown-up people, though just what was to be desired in children.

Cissy soon turned the conversation by observing, "Your uncle is a Roman Catholic Clergyman, I suppose, Adele, as you call him an Abbé."

"O yes, 'Monsieur l'Abbé' is mamma's brother, he comes to see us very often, and would like I think to convert us; he grieves so much that mamma is not of his Church."

"Do you like him?" questioned Cissy doubtfully.

"Mais oui, why should I not! He is very amiable, he gives me the most beautiful cadeaux; I will show you a beautiful locket he gave me when I bade him adieu, it is of gold with a lovely enamelled picture: you will admire it, I know."

Cissy and Maud looked at one another, and laughed at the idea of such an enthusiasm about a mere ornament.

"Do you only care for him because he gives you presents?" asked Rafe scornfully.

"Oh no, I like him because he is kind, sometimes it is true he undertakes to give me little lectures, and those are 'très ennuyants,' but I do

not make a point to listen to them, I practise my steps, I settle my dress, I get rid somehow of the tiresome little discourses."

"And what does your mamma say to that?" inquired Cissy.

"Oh, *chère maman*, she is not one of those who go fuss fuss about everything, she is occupied with other things; sometimes if I am wild, she lifts up her eyes at me, so,"—and Adele threw a most languishing look up at Rafe; "but she cannot scold, she is too amiable."

"And your papa?"

"Oh, he is different, he loves me and pets me, sometimes he is so kind, so tender, but then there are other times, bad times, when he looks so severe. Aunt Harriet is like him something, only her face is not so melancholy. He is very grave, he studies nearly all day, he cares not one bit for all *chère maman's* visitors. He goes with her to the balls, but he hates them, he would far rather be at home with his big dry books; and he is so silent in company, *mamma's* French friends call him '*le pauvre misanthrope*.'"

"Cool of them!" remarked Rafe. "But who teaches you, Adele?"

"Oh, I have an *institutrice*, governess, don't you call it! She comes every morning, and teaches me all sorts of things, she pretends to speak English, such English! Even *mamma*, who knows but a few words, can pronounce much better than she. In the afternoon I am with *mamma*, I visit with her,

I walk on the promenade, in the evening I read English with papa, or watch mamma at her toilette, she goes to the balls when I am going to bed."

"What a different life from ours!" exclaimed Maud.

"Oh yes, yours is very *triste*," began Adele, but as they had reached the house she said no more.

That sunny drawing-room, bright with flowers, pictures, and well bound books, with grandmamma in her comfortable easy chair, Aunt Harriet seated writing at her side, and fair-haired Anna flitting hither and thither, looked anything but '*triste*' when the children entered it. And that soft embrace in which grandmamma folded her darlings, that bright smile of welcome with which Aunt Harriet greeted them, those fond merry speeches of Aunt Anna's, were surely far more satisfying than the gaiety of a French promenade, or the chattering of morning visitors.



CHAPTER IV.

KING ARTHUR.

TIME went on, the short November days flew lightly by, among quiet occupations, and simple pleasures, and already Adele had passed a month at Abbotsbrook. A month unmarked by any peculiar festivity, unvaried by excitement of any sort, and yet not such a very miserable month either, as Adele was obliged in candour to acknowledge, though she thought with some dismay of the prospect of passing five more, exactly in the same manner.

Meanwhile she had become familiarized with the village and its environs, had learnt all her cousin's favourite haunts, and had paid more than one visit to Churchill Abbots, which even in its proprietor's absence was ever open to the young Edens. It must be confessed that she was sadly disappointed by her first view of the 'great house,' as the villagers called it; she had expected to see a cheerful, elegant looking house, luxuriously furnished, and she found a quaint, gloomy old mansion, em-

bosomed in trees, whose internal decorations might have been well attributed to the year one, so cumbersome and out of date were they. Her cousins could not at all understand the personal disappointment she seemed to feel on the subject, and wondered much that her reply to Charlie's blunt question, "What does it matter to you if Mr. Churchill's furniture is old, and his house dark and gloomy?" was only conveyed by a mysterious smile, and a sage nod of her head. Cissy and Maud were quite angry that Adele would not join them in admiring the simple arrangement of Mr. Churchill's old schoolroom, (which as the housekeeper informed them he often used as a sitting-room still) where there was neither carpet, curtains, nor easy chairs, but an immense array of books, a warlike display of guns, spears, and pistols, a quaint old figure of an armed knight in each corner, and a beautiful little painted window, on which was represented the death of the Chevalier Bayard.

In spite of her cousin's indignant protestations Adele would persist in affirming that Mr. Churchill must be a perfect miser, that he was a stupid, tasteless Englishman, and that she saw no use in being rich if you did not make your house elegant and comfortable. In vain Maud assured her that Mr. Churchill's father had chosen to bring up his son like a stoic, and that he had been taught to look on luxury as a vice; in vain Cissy told of the large sums which this "tasteless Englishman" had spent

in the restoration of the Church, and the almost boundless charities which flowed from the wealth of this 'perfect miser.' Adele remained unaccountably displeased, and seemed quite ready to assent to Rafe's remark, "You need not expect to like Mr. Churchill himself any better than his house, though he *is* the Abbotsbrook idol; you may like his appearance, for he is very good looking; but I am much mistaken if you will like *him*."

"Do *you* like him?" she asked in return with so meaning a look, that Rafe saw she was prepared for his impetuous answer "No, nor ever shall, sometimes I almost hate him."

From this time a confidence sprang up between Rafe and his cousin, which though very agreeable to both, was perhaps not very profitable for either. Rafe imparted to her his discontent at his ill health, his grandmamma's humdrum way of living, and his aunt's careful rules and regulations; and she replied with revelations of her regret at not living in Paris, her wish to be rich and grand; and all the thousand foolish notions and aspirations that flitted through her shallowest of shallow minds. Long before this Rafe had given up his idea of making Adele the heroine of one of his stories; he liked her as a companion, thought her piquant and amusing, and was secretly well pleased at the laxity of some of her opinions; but he could not bear to connect her with the bright ideals of truth, and purity, and chivalric honour, which his fine imagination suggested to him, and among which Adele

with her pert wit and artificial graces would have appeared like a soubrette among kings.

This did not prevent him however from confiding to her after a week's acquaintance the secret of his attempts at authorship, and one afternoon when he had secured undisturbed possession of the school-room, she was made the not unwilling auditor of three of his very choicest productions, "Sir Lancelot de Walden, or the Conquests of Chivalry," "The Rose of Nuremberg, a Tale of the Middle Ages," and last not least, "The Crusader, or a Legend of the true Knight, Sir Rodolph de Saumarez," which wanted a few pages to render it complete. She put on a very critical look during their perusal, and was pleased to express a decided preference for "The Rose of Nuremberg," the most sentimental of the three tales, and the one which Maud and the young author himself had agreed to condemn as the worst. She did not in the least comprehend the exalted ideas of Sir Rodolph, nor his earnest wish to perish while wresting the Holy Sepulchre from the Infidel; she was much more urgent than Maud had been in the desire to give him a ladylove, and utterly horrified Rafe by declaring that if Sir Rodolph had been made to fight in order to win honour and fame for himself, and the love of some lady bright, she should have thought it much more sensible, but as it was, "it was all nonsense."

Maud earnestly combated this idea, and Rafe tossed his head in impatient scorn at such an unwelcome suggestion.

"You don't understand the sort of thing, Adele," he said, "you would never have done for a Crusader."

"No, indeed," and she laughed, "I would rather be Miss Adele Eden, a great deal."

Rafe observed, that that being the case, she was hardly a judge of the merits of such a story as his, and she assented, very good humouredly, declaring that for anything she knew, his romance might be very wonderful indeed, only somewhat too wonderful for her. So this grand affair passed off, and Rafe condescendingly forgave Adele her want of appreciation of his hero's character, laying it down to the score of her defective education.

"For do you know," said he, in confidence, to Maud, "I am sure she knows hardly anything about the Crusades, or the Knights Templars, or that kind of thing; all her ideas of knights are men dressed up in armour, with great plumes on their helmets, dawdling about after their ladye-loves, and getting them to work them scarfs: such a girl's notion,—always thinking about haberdashery and stuff!"

Cissy, who had been excluded from making one of the party in the schoolroom that afternoon, was doomed often to find herself *de trop* in these discussions. She had learned to like Adele, and by dint of kind services and unvarying sweetness, had made Adele like her: but they had not much in common, and Adele's unconscious worldliness jarred upon Cissy as much as Rafe's high-flown notions puzzled her. So with a sigh at what she thought

her own extreme stupidity, she withdrew from the confidential talks of which Maud was so fond, and retired to the nursery, to console herself with a game of romps with Charlie and Dora, who were proud to have her as their playmate, and would not wound her tender heart by an affectation of superiority.

The evenings were Cissy's happiest times, for then the whole party assembled together in the drawing-room, and songs, dances, and amusing games made the long winter evenings pass only too quickly; but she often missed her friend Mr. Churchill, and could not help wishing that he would return home, and come, as he was accustomed to do, to make their circle complete.

One evening in the beginning of December, the children were all grouped round the centre table in the drawing room, while Aunt Anna played a lively waltz, and Aunt Harriet chatting in a low tone with Grandmamma, set to rights some mistake in her knitting, when a cheerful decided sort of rat-tat-tat was heard at the hall door.

"Who can that be?" asked Adele in astonishment.

"Mr. Lascelles, perhaps," said Grandmamma.

"Mr. Churchill," said Rafe, with quiet certainty.

"It is," said Miss Eden, looking up, in surprise, "but how could you tell, Rafe? I knew he had come home, for I got a note from him at tea-time; but I did not tell any of you, thinking it would be

an agreeable surprise : agreeable to *some* of you, at least," she added, her colour rising at the cool smile which mantled on her nephew's lips.

Further remark was cut short by the old butler throwing wide the door, and announcing with a beaming face and joyful accent, "Mr. Churchill!"

Adele just glanced up at the new comer, and whispered to Cissy, "He is very like his rap, but not at all what I expected."

Cissy only stared in return, and darted forward to join in the chorus of welcome that was going on on all sides.

Mr. Churchill seemed to have eyes and ears for everybody at once ; and ere long a half sweet, half mischievous glance flashed round upon Adele.

"My old friend William translated into French ! Oh, I know who that must be !" he said, smiling, and holding out his hand ; to which Adele replied with her usual politeness, though a little ruffled by his want of ceremony. She had expected a dark, grave, handsome man—a sort of male type of her Aunt Harriet, with a little additional sternness, and manners "*en grand seigneur* ;" and behold ! here was the reality,—fair-haired, gay, and animated-looking ; not stiff ; not stately ; scarcely to be called handsome ; but with a fine, manly figure, a frank, pleasant face, and a voice the most winning and melodious that she had ever heard.

She could not help being attracted by him, spite of herself, but she was greatly disappointed at his want of grandeur. "He looks as if he were a no-

body," she whispered, to Rafe, "instead of being so rich and well-connected."

"He looks and *is* a thorough gentleman, I will say that for him," was the reply, with ungracious candour, "but for goodness' sake, Adele, don't whisper while he is here."

She reddened a little, and resuming her usual propriety of demeanour, began to listen to Mr. Churchill's account of his travels,—professedly addressed to Dora, who had climbed up on his knee, but amusing enough to interest the elders of the party. He sat near Grandmamma, who looked at him from time to time with almost motherly fondness, and astonished Adele by addressing him as "my dear boy,"—a title which he seemed rather proud of than otherwise. She told him his return was quite a relief to her mind, as she felt sure his uncle had been overworking himself in his absence, and he answered that he had thought Mr. Lascelles looking pale and worn; adding, with a smile, "we must get some one to take his duty and send him on a holiday trip,—must we not, Mrs. Eden?"

Grandmamma shook her head. "Old people like Mr. Lascelles and me are better at home," she said; "but we like to send our young people on their travels."

"I wish you would send me then, grandmamma," muttered Rafe gloomily.

"Oh you are ambitious of seeing the world, are you, Rafe?" said Mr. Churchill; "suppose you

come with me the next time I make a tour, I dare say Mrs. Eden would have no objection."

Rafe's heart leapt at the bare idea of going abroad, but he answered very ungraciously, "that there was no use talking about it."

No more was said of it at the time, for Mr. Churchill turned away with good-humoured indifference, and began to talk to Adele, asking after her father and mother, and a host of the inhabitants of Amiens, with whom he had made friends during a visit he had paid to Mr. Eden when Adele was a child of three, and he himself a boy of sixteen. His predilections seemed quite independent of rank and fashion; and Adele gave a start of horror when he wound up by the inquiry, "And my pretty friend Claudine Villemain, how is she? has she changed her name as every one predicted she would ere long?"

"Claudine Villemain! c'est impossible! you cannot surely mean her, she married a poor ugly man who teaches writing and arithmetic. I believe she lives somewhere in Amiens, but nobody visits her."

"Poor pretty little Claudine!" exclaimed Mr. Churchill undismayed. "Yes, I have no doubt that is she, she was just the sort of person to make a thoroughly disinterested match. Don't you remember, Harriet, how I used to talk about her beauty and innocence when I came home?"

"I remember," said Miss Eden smiling, "you took her portrait, and very pretty it was; and you used to say that graceful little French song, 'Ma

Brunette,' must have been written by some one who had seen her."

"Exactly. And now nobody visits her! Well if ever I go to Amiens again I will go and find her out, and see if I can do anything for her; pity I am too old to take lessons in writing and arithmetic as a tribute to her worthy husband."

Miss Eden laughed merrily, and Adele glanced from one to the other in unfeigned astonishment; but here Charlie interrupted with a subject nearer home. "Won't you have the school feast soon, Mr. Churchill?" said he. "Aunt Harriet said it would be after you came back."

"Aunt Harriet was right, it is to be in about a fortnight. My uncle and I are going to settle it all with the schoolmaster to-morrow. It is to be held in the boys' schoolroom, and we are going to have a new treat this year, what do you think?"

"Anything to eat?" said Charlie after a moment's pause of thought.

"Partly; but I think the eating part of it will not be the chief pleasure."

"Oh, what can it be then?" was the puzzled rejoinder. "Aunt Harriet, do you know? oh, I dare say you do, Mr. Churchill always tells you his secrets."

"He has not told me this one," she answered smiling; "but I think I can guess."

"Oh, and Aunt Anna guesses too, I see it in her eyes. Now you dear little Aunt Anna, you must tell me this very minute. Come, whisper;" and

the coaxing little fellow put his arm round his aunt's neck and drew her fair face down to his. She put her lips close to his ear, and he darted a triumphant look at Mr. Churchill, as if to say, "I shall know in a minute;" but instead of confiding the secret, her sweet mirthful voice only whispered a mischievous "cuck-oo!" which made Charlie start, and affirm with much displeasure that he "hated tricks."

"Except when you play them yourself, I suppose, Charlie," said Mr. Churchill laughing; "but never mind, I will tell you without any more guessing, we are going to have a Christmas-tree."

"A Christmas-tree, oh jolly!" cried the boy. "I want to see one so much, and I never have, except in a picture."

"Ah, I thought you would approve; and it is to be such a famous tree, about five feet high, and all hung over with presents, and fruit, and little coloured lamps."

"How pretty," said Cissy: "have you got all the things to put on it?"

"Not all; but I bought a good many in Germany, and my Aunt Clara has promised to send me some: besides we have a fortnight in which to prepare."

"How I should like to make some things!" began Cissy in an aside to her Aunt Anna, when her attention was arrested by something which Mr. Churchill was saying to Charlie.

"I have another piece of news for you, which I

think you will be glad to hear. Harcourt is to be at the feast. In one of his letters he told me that he was coming down for Christmas, so I wrote and begged him to come in time for the school treat, as I know he is quite in his element in amusing children."

"Oh I know he's capital!" said Charlie with enthusiasm. "I remember last Christmas he did such funny tricks, made pretend candles out of apples, and poured four different kinds of wine out of the same bottle, and all sorts of things like that."

"Who is he?" questioned Adele of Cissy: "some conjuror?"

"Oh, no, no," answered Cissy, "he only does conjuring tricks for fun; he is Mr. Harcourt Lascelles, Lady Clara's only son, and our Mr. Churchill's cousin."

"*Our* Mr. Churchill, Cissy," commented mischievous Aunt Anna; "how long has he been made over to us as our property?"

Cissy blushed and was silent, congratulating herself that she had spoken in too low a tone to be overheard by the object of her remark, but Adele laughed and arched her eyebrows as was her custom when she thought she knew more about something than she chose to say.

Meantime Rafe and Maud sat a little way back from the others, both apparently reading, though Rafe was in reality listening intently to Mr. Churchill's conversation. Maud had at first been a listener,

but at length had found something even more attractive in a book which Mr. Churchill had brought in his hand, and had laid down on the table at his entrance. It was Tennyson's Poems, which Maud had never seen, and a peep into it showed her something so charming, that, emboldened by a consenting nod from her friend, she retired into a corner of the room, and crouching on a low stool, pored over it with intense delight, unnoticed by any one but its owner, who watched with some amusement the changing emotions on the child's expressive face. The 'Sleeping beauty' was the first that she read, and she laughed quietly to herself at the description of the enchanted king and his courtiers waking up after their hundred years' nap, and lingered with earnest admiration over the graceful description of the beauty asleep. Then "Lady Godiva," the "May Queen," the "Dream of Fair Women," were in turn read and enjoyed, and still the little maiden's eyes seemed riveted to the bewitching volume.

Rafe meanwhile was treating his book to a series of frowns which he did not care should be observed by the rest of the party; he held it up as close before his face as if he had suddenly grown short-sighted; and bent his black brows, and curled his lips, at what Mr. Churchill was saying to Charlie, more especially when the information came of Mr. Harcourt's expected visit, which, for some reason or other, seemed to annoy him particularly.

He was startled presently by a light touch upon

his arm, and a book poked over his own. Looking up he saw it was Maud, who, standing beside him, was pointing with an eager glowing face to the poem called "Sir Galahad." "See," she said, "he is like your Sir Rodolph, *do* read it, you will like it so much."

He read it, and ceased to frown, his fine eyes lit up with intelligent pleasure, a soft glow of awakened feeling suffused his sallow cheek. He forgot to hold the volume so as to hide his face, and when he looked up at last, it was to meet a kindly inquiring glance from Mr. Churchill, who had been struck by his expression during the perusal of the poem. Maud saw the look and hastened to answer it. "It is 'Sir Galahad' that Rafe has been reading," she said, advancing towards her friend, "have you read it, Mr. Churchill?"

"Yes, indeed, Maud. And not once, but a great many times. Do you like it?"

"I think it is beautiful," she answered, in the low tone of intense pleasure, and looking towards Rafe as if to find an echo to her sentiment.

"What is it?" inquired Aunt Harriet, struck by the earnestness expressed in her tone. "Can you spare me the book a moment, Rafe?"

He brought it over to her, but stood by her side while she read it, with a somewhat supercilious face, and was not at all surprised when after quietly perusing it she returned the book to him, and turning to Mr. Churchill said, "I like it, and I remember reading the legend on which it is founded

in your old 'Morte d'Arthur;' but I should suppose it to be rather beyond a child's comprehension." She was thinking of Maud, but Rafe chose to imagine that she included him in her remark, and walked back to his seat with an air of offended dignity. "I knew she would say something like that," he thought to himself. "I only wonder Mr. Churchill did not say so too."

But Mr. Churchill was not at all of that opinion. "We have a little taste for poetry, haven't we, Maud?" he said, drawing the child up to him, and glancing at Miss Eden with a sort of playful defiance: "so we do sometimes venture to understand and admire what was not intended for such very young people's comprehensions."

Maud blushed. "I think I understand this," she said humbly; "I read the story of Sir Galahad once in a magazine, perhaps I should not have known else what it meant about his going in search of the San Greal."

"Did you read the poem just before 'Sir Galahad,' the one called 'S. Agnes's Eve?'" Mr. Churchill inquired.

"Oh! yes, I read that," she answered eagerly, "and liked it very much. I knew it would be pretty when I saw the beginning, 'Deep on the convent roof the snows are sparkling to the moon.'"

"Rather a rapid conclusion that," was the smiling answer; "but tell me, do you know who S. Agnes was?"

"Oh, yes; at least I know something about her.

She was very young and beautiful, and they wanted her to marry a bad man, and she wouldn't, and she died a martyr. Aunt Anna told us, don't you remember, Cissy?"

"I remember," said Cissy thoughtfully; "and Aunt Anna told us, too, that S. Agnes is represented in pictures with a lamb in her arms; how I should like to see a picture of her with her lamb!"

"What do you think she should be like, Cissy?" inquired Mr. Churchill.

"Oh, I don't know," she answered hesitatingly, "very pretty, and looking as if she was very good; I don't know anything else about it."

"Oh, I know!" began Maud; but then stopped, and coloured painfully, remembering that her opinion had not been asked.

"Go on, Maud," said her friend, encouragingly; and thus re-assured, she went on.

"I should like her to be slight, and not very tall; and I should like her dress to be part blue and part white. She should have a wreath of white roses on her head, and her hair should be beautiful and flowing—rather dark, but with a sort of shining on it. Her face should be a little turned upwards, and her eyes very dark and still; and she should look just as pure, and innocent, and good as the little lamb she should have in her arms."

Rafe and Cissy hung upon the description so enthusiastically given; and Mr. Churchill listened to it with pleased and thoughtful attention. Aunt Harriet found out that Maud's cheeks were flushed,

and reminded her that she had a little bit of work to do before bed-time, which was fast approaching. The little girl sought for her needle, and commenced a diligent stitching, without opening her lips again except to speak to Rafe, who came to sit by her, and was particularly kind and affectionate to her all the rest of the evening.

When the time came for saying good-night, Mr. Churchill, as he took Cissy's hand, looked inquiringly up in her face, and said with a smile, "Well, was Maud's description the right one? Is that what you would wish S. Agnes to be like?"

"Yes, I think so," she said, meditatively; "yes, quite. I wish Maud could paint, for I am sure she would make such a beautiful picture: she knows so well how it ought to be."

No more was said then, but about a fortnight afterwards a parcel arrived for Cissy, of a very mysterious size and appearance, which, being opened, proved to be a small picture of S. Agnes, represented much as Maud had described her. Cissy was at no loss to guess the donor; for she had often before seen specimens of Mr. Churchill's skill as an artist, and she knew this beautiful gift must have come from him.

She gazed at it with rapture, but could find no other words to express her emotion than her usual exclamation, "How very pretty!"

"Pretty!" said Rafe, in a contemptuous aside to Maud; "I do believe that is the only word of admiration that Cissy has any idea of. Mr.

Churchill ought to have given that picture to you ; *you* understand it."

"But Cissy deserves it," said Maud, with tears in her eyes ; "Cissy is *so* good."

And Cissy did deserve it, and prized it greatly. It was hung up in her own room at Aunt Harriet's suggestion ; and every morning the little girl looked at it, every morning she said to herself, "How very pretty !" If she did not understand it in an artistic point of view, she did in one that was far better ; for whenever she looked at the pure and saintly face, she too longed to be pure and good, resolving with steadfast mind and purpose to use her best endeavours so to be.



CHAPTER V.

THE SCHOOL FEAST.

IN the week preceding Christmas-day the weather suddenly became cold and frosty, and little Maud was often reminded of Tennyson's poem by seeing the "snows sparkling to the moon" when before retiring to rest for the night, she took a peep from her bedroom window at the white world outside. When she looked anxiously out on the evening before the day fixed upon for the school feast, the downy flakes were descending thick and fast, and she almost feared that a snowstorm would put an end to the schemes for the morrow's enjoyment. But in the morning a bright sun shone in at the casement, the snow had ceased to fall, and though it lay thick upon the ground, it was so crisped by the frost, as to be no hindrance to foot-passengers.

The children found their lessons somewhat irksome that morning, though to do them justice they endeavoured to be very industrious, and not to think too much of the treat in store for them. After a very early dinner they set forth, accom-

panied by both their aunts; their grandmamma, who never went out in cold weather, being quite content to remain alone that afternoon, rather than anyone should miss the treat on her account.

They had a very pleasant walk to the school, and Cissy and Maud beguiled the way by giving Adele an account of former school feasts, of which they had been the happy witnesses.

When they arrived at the schoolhouse Cissy's favourite phrase "how very pretty!" was echoed in different tones, by nearly all the party. The boys' schoolroom, which from being the largest had been chosen as the scene of the entertainment, was enlivened by two splendid blazing fires, and the walls were thickly ornamented with red-berried holly, and other evergreens. Long tables spread with snowwhite cloths, were ranged down the centre of the room, covered with an immense array of knives, forks, and plates, which seemed to hold out unmistakeable promise of the feast which was soon to be forthcoming. All looked inviting and comfortable enough, but at the further end of the room, hidden by a large screen, was the grand treat of the afternoon, the Christmas tree.

The room seemed quite untenanted, and after bestowing their tribute of admiration on the tasteful arrangement of its leafy decorations, the younger children ran up to the screen, and were wondering whether it might be possible or permissible to take a peep behind it, when it was moved a little to one side, and Mr. Lascelles and his nephew issued forth.

"Oh mayn't we go in and see the tree?" was Charlie's eager request when the first greetings were over, but Mr. Churchill shook his head, and said laughingly, "I mean to be very cruel, and refuse the least glimpse of it till it is all lighted up. I have just this moment finished putting the last things on it. All your kind presents, young ladies," he added, turning to the little girls, "have been duly hung up, and in the most prominent places I could find for them."

"Oh! thank you," said Cissy; "won't the children soon be here?"

"I think so, I expect them every minute; but before they come, can anybody suggest any desirable change in the preparations?"

He said 'anybody,' but he looked at Aunt Harriet, and she, after giving a critical glance around, pronounced the arrangements perfect.

"We have had fires lighted in the girls' school also," said Mr. Lascelles, "so that after dinner some of the children can go and play there, and that is gay with evergreens too. Arthur has been working hard with the help of the schoolmaster ever since breakfast, without considering that he was up nearly all last night."

"How was that?" said Miss Eden, a little anxiously.

"Only that I dined at Woodmere yesterday in honour of Harcourt's arrival, and just as I got home about eleven my lodgekeeper stopped me to say her poor old father was dying and wanted

to speak to me. Of course I went in to see him, and the poor old man was so loth to let me go, and talked so much of how he had nursed me when I was a baby, and had always hoped I should be near to close his eyes, that I could not think of leaving him, though he did not appear to me to be really in danger. He fell asleep about five in the morning, and then I went home and lay down for an hour. You will be glad to hear he is much better this morning."

"And you have not even managed to make yourself look pale and interesting, so as to call forth our pity for your sleepless night," said Anna archly.

"I don't feel as if I wanted any pity," he answered laughing; "but if you feel inclined to bestow any, let it be on the score of Harcourt's desertion; he promised to come and help me to decorate, and he has not appeared yet. I suppose he will come with my aunt, she talked of driving over this afternoon."

"I think that is Lady Clara coming now," said Maud, who was watching from the window the approach of a little open carriage drawn by two lovely cream-coloured ponies.

"And I see some of the school children coming too," said Cissy with a radiant face, "those nice little Morrisises in their red cloaks, and that dear little Johnnie Andrews."

She ran to open the door for "dear little Johnnie Andrews," and was so absorbed in the pleasure of welcoming him to the feast, that she forgot to

be shy when Lady Clara Lascelles entered after him, and held out her hand with a friendly "how do you do?" Adele, who had been looking rather bored, cheered up at the sight of the elegant Lady Clara, and was delighted to see on what good terms her aunts appeared to be with her, and how cordially she pressed them to come and see her, and bring their little nieces with them; adding, that it was an age since she had seen Mrs. Eden, and that she should certainly have paid her a visit long before, but that ever since her return from town, she had been confined to the house with a cold. Adele remembered that she had heard her cousins speak of the beauty of Woodmere, and wondered much that they had never told her anything of its charming owner; but her reflections were soon cut short by the entrance of Mr. Harcourt Lascelles, a dark-haired, pleasant-looking young man, who might more properly have been called boy, so very youthful did he appear. He came up the room with a swift step, and shook hands all round, with a mock propriety, which was little in unison with the merry mischief that lurked in his bright black eyes. He greeted Adele with a bow so absurdly low and deferential, that she could not help laughing, though she was a good deal vexed; and glanced at his cousin Arthur with a look of pretended penitence and fear, which amused everybody except Rafe, who, turning scornfully aside, muttered the fortunately inaudible remark, "What an idiot!"

"Accept my humble apologies, most serene King

Arthur, for my defection this morning," proceeded the unabashed Harcourt; "Miss Anna, let me intreat you to plead for me; you may feel sure that I am deeply penitent."

"You look about as sincere as Reinecke Fuchs when he apologises for killing the 'good Lampe,'" was Mr. Churchill's laughing answer, "but I suppose we must graciously admit you to pardon."

"Ah, you are growing mild in your old age," retorted his cousin; "I have not forgotten the inextinguishable lickings you used to administer if I displeased your highness in any way when we were boys together."

"Don't make me blush by reminding me of my good deeds," said Mr. Churchill, coolly; "you owe it to me that you are not a perfect mass of conceit," but at this moment the school children began to arrive in crowds, and the young men left off their good-humoured badinage, and made themselves useful in getting the little people arranged comfortably on either side of the long dining-tables.

When they were all settled, the schoolmaster and his wife, and some of the rectory servants appeared through a side door, which opened into the master's house, bearing large dishes of roast beef, and other smoking viands, which they deposited upon the table. And then all the children stood up reverently, while Mr. Lascelles said grace; and oh! when that was over, what a clatter of knives and forks began! what hard work the carvers had! and how briskly Cissy, and Maud, and Charlie rushed

about with plates full and empty, eagerly assisting the servants in their work of waiting upon the little feasters.

How happy Cissy was in cutting up Johnnie Andrews' dinner for him, and seeing him enjoy it, and how she longed to kiss him when he looked up at her gratefully, with his little smiling face. He was one of the tinies,—and the tinies were all Cissy's especial pets. She cut up a great many dinners besides Johnnie's, and received a great many lisping "thank you's" from little lips. But what *was* Aunt Harriet doing? Cissy saw her go up to a little girl who was seated in rather an odd attitude at one corner of the table, and take from her something which looked like a bundle, and with which she presently retired into the girls' empty schoolroom. Nobody else seemed to observe her, but presently Lady Clara, who had been chatting with Mr. Lascelles and Anna, came up to the table, and asked, in some astonishment, "Arthur, do you know where Miss Eden is? She has vanished suddenly; I hope she is not ill?"

He did not know, but volunteered to look for her, and Cissy followed him to tell him what she had seen. They went into the girls' room together, and there was Aunt Harriet, walking up and down, and in her arms not a bundle, but a baby!

"I did not know that an invitation had been issued to any one so *very* juvenile," said Mr. Churchill, as he came up to her; "where did you find your little charge?"

"It is a little Ashdowne," she answered; "I found poor Fanny Ashdowne in the pursuit of dinner under difficulties, trying to eat and hold the baby at the same time. She told me that she could not have come at all, unless she had brought the little one with her: for you know she has no mother, and it seems the poor child (being almost a stranger here) does not know any of her neighbours well enough to like to ask them to take it."

"And so you came to the rescue,—you, who profess not to like babies!"

"I didn't think I did," she answered, smiling; "but this poor motherless little thing wins upon me strangely. Don't you, baby?" she added, dancing it in her arms as she spoke.

"Shan't I take it, Aunt Harriet?" said Cissy, who was divided between the wish to relieve her aunt of her burden, and the longing to go back to the dinner-table, and take care of her little favourites.

"No, thank you, my child, go back to your pets," replied Miss Eden. "And," she continued, after a moment's pause, without noticing that Cissy, instead of moving, was standing irresolute near the doorway, "please, dearest Arthur, go back too. I hope your aunt will not think me rude for running away from her; but I thought it was better to steal away in here, and not make my baby and myself remarkable."

"Dearest Arthur!" The words coming from Aunt Harriet, with whom epithets of affection

were a thing almost unknown, struck Cissy with a sense of profound amazement; her blue eyes opened wide with astonishment, and it was not until Mr. Churchill accidentally turned round and saw her that it occurred to her she could not have been meant to overhear, and with a hurried "Oh, I beg your pardon," she escaped into the other room.

"For once you were incautious, Harriet," said Mr. Churchill, when she had gone.

"I am afraid so," Miss Eden answered slightly blushing; "but Cissy may be trusted, she never repeats what she hears: if she had not such a transparent face I would have told her of our engagement long ago."

"But you think she would show by her face she had a secret, though she might not say anything of it."

"Yes, I think so; but I should like to tell her, she is such a dear good child."

"Perhaps if she were told, Rafe ought to be told too, as he is the eldest," said Mr. Churchill.

"Yes, and I do not wish that; I am afraid he would watch us and look disdainful."

"Impertinent, you mean," was the reply with a half amused, half melancholy smile.

"Perhaps, and I could not endure that. He must not know until it is quite necessary."

"There is only one other person whom I should more dislike taking into our confidence," was the rejoinder in a tone of intense amusement, "and

that is shallow, bright-eyed little Miss Adele. Just conceive how she would patronise us ; and do you know I am very much afraid she has some suspicions already. What a precocious little lady it is !”

Miss Eden might have returned his remark about incautionsness, if she had seen the little figure smaller and trimmer than Cissy’s, which after hovering some time in the doorway stole away with stealthy steps just as he finished speaking ; but she was standing by the fire, with her back to the door, and neither she nor Mr. Churchill were aware of the unpleasant fact that Adele had herself overheard his uncomplimentary observation.

Just at this moment Mr. Harcourt skipped upon the scene, nearly tumbling over Adele as he came in ; he hastened up to Miss Eden, snatched (though not roughly) the infant from her arms, and commenced dancing it up and down, jumping about himself as he did so, and executing what he called “the true Indian war dance, minus feathers and paint.” It was impossible to do anything but laugh, though Miss Eden was rather frightened for the baby, and begged very earnestly to have it given back to her.

“Not a bit of it,” declared Mr. Harcourt, and without heeding remonstrances he carried it off in triumph into the other room, and presented it to Lady Clara’s notice as “one of the most distinguished and interesting of Miss Eden’s numerous protégées.”

Fortunately for the poor little thing, who was

sitting in a most uncomfortably upright position in Harcourt's arms, staring at him with an intensely bewildered expression in its baby eyes, one of the women servants from the Rectory volunteered to take it, and carried it off to the master's house, where after being regaled with some bread and milk it soon went comfortably to sleep.

And so as Harcourt observed, "the baby episode was happily disposed of, and they were all at liberty to turn their attention to the elder branches of the Abbotsbrook juveniles."

Neither Rafe nor Adele had taken any part in waiting on the little feasters, he being too lazy to care to bestir himself, and she considering it beneath her dignity to fly about in the service of poor children, after the fashion of her less fastidious cousins. They had found a comfortable seat in one corner of the large room, and there Rafe sat leaning back against the wall, with his arms folded, and his great black eyes, in which lay a whole world of intelligence and dreamy thoughtfulness, scanning idly the scene before him. He was amused by Adele's sharp, pertinent remarks on all that was going on; but he got tired of them at last, and was not sorry when she jumped up and ran as she said "to see what Aunt Harriet could be about," an errand which ended rather uncomfortably for her.

She came back looking very discontented and a good deal offended, and re-seating herself by her cousin's side, said in a tone intended to pique his

curiosity, "We ought to congratulate each other on the prospect of having a new relation."

His only answer was a stare of rather languid astonishment, but she went on; "You are charmed doubtless at the idea of having an uncle so much to your taste." He was very innocent in many ways, and would have been completely puzzled as to her meaning, but that as she spoke her glance was directed to her aunt and Mr. Churchill, who were at that moment entering the room together, and following the direction of her eyes he guessed in a moment to whom she alluded.

"What makes you think *that*?" he said with displeased surprise.

She answered by telling him what she had overheard, together with several trifling things which a less precocious child would never have noticed, adding that she had once heard her mamma say that her aunt was going to marry a very grand, rich gentleman, and that directly Maud had told her of the intimacy with Mr. Churchill she had suspected it was he to whom her mamma had alluded.

Rafe, though very much vexed, could not help believing her; the thing seemed, as he said to himself, "only *too* probable!" But he did not utter, as she expected, any exclamation of annoyance, and his first words astonished her very much, for they were, "Had you any business to listen? Did they know you overheard them?"

"No; of course not," she replied. "I stole

away on tiptoe, and they had their backs turned, so they never saw me."

"How long did you listen?" he demanded, quite sternly.

"Only a minute or two," she answered, somewhat frightened at his manner; "'our engagement' were the first words I heard, and then what I told you after."

"All that! Do you know what I think you ought to do?"

"No—what do you mean?" she said, quite astonished at finding a severe censor in one whom she had considered as careless as herself.

"I think you ought to tell Aunt Harriet that you overheard them. It was dishonourable to listen, in the first place, and in the second, it is not honourable to conceal having done so. And I'll tell you what, Adele," he added, with irrepressible scorn, "I would not do a dishonourable thing for the world,—no, not for the world; and I should have thought you would have felt the same."

She turned from the indignant brightness of his face with a gesture half ashamed, half contemptuous.

"You talk like one of your own high-flown knights, Rafe," she murmured, pettishly. "How can I tell Aunt Harriet? She would never forgive me, nor Mr. Churchill either. He dislikes me already, I know he does; and I am sure I detest him!"

Her eyes were full of passionate tears. She had done very wrong, and she was not penitent; only ashamed and angry,—vexed with herself, but still more vexed with everybody else.

Poor, unsuspecting Mr. Churchill! He came up to her at that very moment, and asked kindly whether she would like to join in the games which were just going to begin. She could hardly control her voice sufficiently to reply in the negative; and her manner was so odd, that he noticed it, and inquired if she felt ill. Vexation gave her the power to answer, "Oh no, thank you; pray don't trouble yourself about me. I am quite well; but I don't want to play."

He did not press her, but turned to Rafe, and asked whether it would tire him too much to take the part of master of the ceremonies to a portion of the schoolboys, and superintend their games. Rafe had the sensitiveness peculiar to many delicate people, and could not bear to hear his want of strength alluded to, however slightly; so what with this, and the unwelcome prospect that Adele had opened to him, he did not reply to the invitation much more amiably than she had done: and he thought to himself that anything would have been less galling than the good-humoured smile, and the indifferent "Oh! very well," with which his refusal was received.

"It's a pity he has not better manners, poor boy," was the young man's mental reflection, as he went back to his unselfish task of amusing the

school-children ; and he appreciated Cissy's simple good-nature and Maud's engaging sweetness all the more for the contrast. And they really were very good, and taught the little ones such pleasant plays, and took care of them so nicely ; while their aunts and Mr. Harcourt exerted themselves most amiably, and Charlie and Dora dashed about with great goodwill and the most hearty enjoyment, if not with any very definite purpose.

There were games at French blind-man's-buff, thread the needle, hunt the slipper, &c. ; but the most popular was one called "the laughing school." A number of children of both sexes stood up in a circle, determined to be grave, while Mr. Harcourt called upon each of them in turn to perform some extraordinary antic, and exercised all his ingenuity to make them laugh. Whenever they laughed, they paid a forfeit ; and it was quite ludicrous to see how quickly the forfeits accumulated, for Mr. Harcourt was so irresistibly comic, that it was not in boy or girl nature to remain unmoved. Even Mr. Lascelles and the dignified Lady Clara, who were among the lookers on, could not refrain from laughing when some of his sallies reached their ears : no wonder, then, that they were too much for the gravity of the school children.

In the meanwhile Rafe and Adele sat gloomily in their corner, careless of Cissy's and Maud's, and above all Charlie's constant entreaties that they would "come and have some fun." They were pleased, however, at last, in spite of themselves,

and that was when, late in the afternoon, the great screen was taken away, and the Christmas tree was revealed in all its splendour. It looked so bright and pretty, with its shining store of presents, and its clusters of coloured lamps; and was to them so thoroughly novel a sight, that they were both aroused from their gloom, and emerging from their corner, joined the crowd of gazers.

The village children set up a "hurrah!" when it first burst upon their sight; and never was pleasure more unfeigned, or more natural in its expression. For a few minutes nothing was heard but a buzz of exclamations, such as, "Do you see that lovely doll?" "Oh! what a pretty little man in armour!" "Just look at that nice little work-basket!" "And oh! see, there's the Union Jack at the very top of the tree."

When all had gazed to their heart's content, Mr. Churchill and Harcourt Lascelles began to take the things off the tree, and distribute them among the children. There was a present for each child, and most satisfactory they proved. "Thank you, sir," "Oh, thank you, sir!" was echoed on all sides in voices of eager delight; and the gentlemen took care to let the children know that many of the presents had been contributed by the kindness of the little Miss Edens.

Cissy was delighted to find that Johnny Andrews had got a charming little figure of an Italian organ boy, whose organ was made to open, and contained a choice collection of sugar-plums; but

what was her surprise when a lovely little azure-lined work-basket was held up before her, and Mr. Churchill's kind voice said, "You are not above taking a Christmas box, are you, Cissy?"

She had hardly begun her thanks when he darted away, and returned with his hands full of gifts for the others.

"Does this look promising?" he said, placing a gaily bound volume (which, being too heavy for suspension, had been placed on the table within shadow of the tree) in the hands of little Maud.

"Poetry, oh!" and Maud's voice was breathless with pleasure, "thank you, thank you, so very much." But he had passed on to Adele.

There was less cordiality and more amusement in his tones as he presented this gift, a very elegant little "port-monnaie," with a view of Paris enamelled on one side of it; and Adele was so taken by surprise, that her self-composure deserted her, and she stammered out some almost inaudible thanks.

For Rafe it was even worse: if he could possibly have rejected the handsome volume so quietly placed in his hands, he certainly would have done so; but that was out of the question: and he was obliged passively to accept it, though his "thank you" seemed to stick in his throat. He saw at a glance that it had reference to his favourite "middle ages," and he anticipated much pleasure in reading it; but then he was to owe this pleasure to Mr. Churchill, who had spoken of him as impertinent,

and whom he had long ago made up his mind to dislike.

Far more satisfactory was Charlie and Dora's simple delight in the receipt of their presents; Dora's being a doll dressed as a fairy, with which she was so much enchanted, that, much to every one's amusement, she insisted on kissing the donor, and could not be pacified till he had submitted to the ceremony.

Soon after this, the entertainments of the day were pronounced to be over, and the village children were summoned to stand in a circle and sing "God save the Queen" before dispersing. Then, when the last of the sweet young voices had died away, there was a general call for bonnets and cloaks, and all went merrily on their homeward path.



CHAPTER VI.

A GOOD GRUMBLE.

"WHAT do you think about telling Maud?" It was Rafe who put the question, to which Adele hastily responded, "I think it would be folly, we had much better keep our own counsel. Maud has no idea of concealing anything; she would be just as likely as not to betray our secret."

"*Your* secret," said Rafe haughtily, "for pray remember it is no concern of mine, I could not help your telling me, and that is all I had to do with it. It was not *I* who listened at the door."

"You are very unkind," pouted Adele; "every one is unkind, I think;" and with a gesture of petulant disgust she flung herself down on a seat near the window, and gazed moodily out at the snow-strewn garden.

Rafe went to her side, and stood watching in silence the faint glimpses of winter sunshine which occasionally shone on the leafless trees, and gilded the spire of Abbotsbrook Church which was just visible in the distance.

"I should like to go away somewhere," he said

at last, with a weary sigh, "I am so tired of this stupid village, where one day is exactly like another; those bare trees, with that dim greyish, blue sky, and the tall stiff little spire pointing up into it, are just an image of one's life here, dull and wretched, with nothing but duty, duty, dinned into one's ears all day."

"I suppose the spire is the image of duty," said Adele, rousing herself, and laughing, "certainly it gives one a truly stiff notion of it. Do you know, Rafe—yes, I declare—the spire is like Aunt Harriet!"

"When she wears that slate-coloured dress of hers, I suppose," he answered with a half smile; "but Aunt Harriet is very handsome, though, there's no denying that."

"Yes, but I don't admire her; I did when first I came, and I thought Mr. Churchill very good looking and pleasant the night I first saw him; in fact, I liked them both pretty well, then, but now I know better."

Know better! Poor child, she was making a sad mistake; mortified vanity had blinded her eyes, and she had given herself up to the prejudices thus engendered, without a single struggle against them. Christmas Day, with its "goodwill to men," its peaceful, happy influences, had come and gone, but no word of its message of love had touched Adele's sullen heart; she remained bitterly offended, determinately discontented, and seemed to find no pleasure but in getting alone with Rafe, and talking

with him over what he called "the unbearable prospect" of having Mr. Churchill for an uncle.

Since the school-feast her manner to her aunt had changed more and more, till at last it had become quite disagreeable. She had grown careless of pleasing her, and was so inattentive at her studies, that her aunt, who had been disposed to be indulgent to her in consideration of her having been spoiled at home, was at last obliged to show towards her a grave displeasure which only served to estrange them more. This very morning had been the witness of an uncomfortable scene in which Adele had behaved so badly that when Mr. Churchill came early in the afternoon to propose an expedition to Woodmere, which was regarded by the children as a most delightful treat, Miss Eden had with considerable reluctance decided on excluding her from the party.

Rafe had insisted upon remaining at home also, though every one begged him to go, and Mr. Churchill fearing the walk might be too much for him had offered to lend him his beautiful black horse which was just spirited enough without being restive, and went (as Rafe knew, for he had ridden it several times) at a pace delightfully easy and yet swift. What other boy of fifteen would have refused such a tempting offer for the sake of sitting at home to grumble about the dulness of life? Even Rafe would hardly have been so foolish if he had not been influenced by his proud dislike to accept favours from Mr. Churchill. And so here sat

the two foolish young people all alone in the school-room, bewailing the imaginary hardness of their lot, till they wound themselves up to a pitch of discontent, and Adele declared she should write to her Mamma, and beg to be allowed to come home to her at once.

"And I might ask her to let you come with me, Rafe," she added, "a little change would do you good."

"That's a brilliant idea," exclaimed Rafe with energy; but his face darkened again directly as he went on, "it's not a bit of use though, your papa said you were to stay here six months, and then he would come and fetch you himself; I know that was in his letter to grandmamma before you came, Aunt Anna told me so; and he said, too, that he should hope to find you improved, for he hinted, you know," (and her cousin's tone became indescribably arch,) "that there was considerable room for improvement."

Adele looked annoyed, and said thoughtfully, "Yes, that is just it. Papa makes a great pet of me when I am with him, but he is not satisfied, he thinks mamma spoils me; he is like Aunt Harriet in some things, and I know he thinks a great deal of her, he told me he hoped I should try to take pattern by her example, and he said he had always respected her, even when she was a mere child, because she was so conscientious."

"She is that," said Rafe quietly.

"Sans doute," replied Adele, "but because peo-

ple are good they are not always agreeable, and Aunt Harriet is unpleasant spite of her goodness."

"I don't know," Rafe answered doubtfully. "How fond grandmamma and Aunt Anna are of her, and how the children dote upon her, except perhaps Charlie, and even he loves her very much really, although he gets vexed with her sometimes because she keeps him in order."

Poor Rafe! that was exactly his own case if he had but known it; he had a sincere love for his aunt deep down in his heart, though it was hidden even from himself by an habitual feeling of annoyance at her endeavours to rouse him from his indolent dreams and make him more unselfish and practical. He was too candid to assent to Adele's assertion that her aunt was disagreeable; his thoughts involuntarily flew back to his last illness in which she had nursed him so tenderly, and thinking of the kind patient face that had watched beside his bed, and the sweet voice that had soothed his sufferings, a pang of penitent regret for his ingratitude smote him to the heart. He felt more inclined to be just towards her than he had been for a long time, more disposed to acknowledge that perhaps after all his unhappiness might be his own fault.

He was roused from his reverie by Adele's voice exclaiming "Here they are!" and looking up, he saw little Maud rush through the garden gate, her hands full of flowers. She came to the window, which opened to the ground, and tapped to have it unfastened; Adele rose and unhasped it, and the

child bounded in, looking the very picture of joyous beauty, her eyes sparkling, her bright curls tossed back from her face, and lovely roses in her usually pale cheeks.

"See, Rafe, see," she said eagerly, "what delightful flowers Lady Clara has given me; they came out of her new hothouse, such a beautiful place! There are a quantity more coming too; Aunt Anna has got charge of them, and she and Cissy, and Charlie, and Dora are coming home in Lady Clara's pony-carriage."

"How did you come then?" asked Rafe, pulling her to him for a kiss.

"Oh, I walked with Aunt Harriet and Mr. Churchill; they have stopped at the gate to speak to a poor woman."

"How very much 'de trop' she must have been," said Adele, in an aside to Rafe.

He laughed, and Maud overheard and looked puzzled; then, as if with a new light breaking in upon her, she darted away, and running up to her aunt who had just come into the garden and was waiting while Mr. Churchill fastened the gate, she said breathlessly, "Aunt Harriet, would you rather I had come in the pony-carriage; you did not say I ought to, but I am afraid I have teased you, talking so much all the way home."

Miss Eden looked extremely astonished, and a little bit confused, but answered smiling, "There would not have been room for you in the carriage, you know, Maud."

"No more there would," replied the child, with an air of relief, "but Adele said I must have been 'de trop,' and I thought that meant that you could not have wanted to have me."

"Why should we not want to have you?" replied her aunt kindly.

"Why," said Maud innocently, and with utter ignorance of her cousin's true meaning, "I suppose Adele thought you would have talked more pleasantly without me. Don't you have nicer talks when none of us children are by to interrupt?"

It was impossible not to be amused, but Maud could not at all comprehend why Mr. Churchill laughed so merrily, and why her aunt blushed as she patted her cheek, and called her a "silly little puss."

"You are not vexed then?" she said, looking up wistfully at them both.

"Not a bit," said Mr. Churchill. "Not with you," said her aunt, for she could not help being annoyed at Adele's speech, which evidently meant much more than Maud imagined.

They advanced towards the house, and entered by the school-room window as being the nearest way. Rafe and Adele had been somewhat at a loss to guess the reason of the laughter they had heard, on the score of which Rafe had mentally accused Mr. Churchill of being "childish," and they neither of them felt much at their ease, Adele especially, as she knew herself to be in disgrace for her behaviour of the morning.

Their aunt's first question was destined to confuse them more, though it was only the very simple one, "How has your grandmamma been getting on?"

They awoke too late to the recollection that they had neglected the parting injunction of both their aunts, "not to leave their grandmamma alone long;" they had left her alone altogether, and now what excuse could they offer?

Rafe began in a tone which he meant to be frank and courageous, but which was more defiant than anything else. "It was my fault, Aunt Harriet, I proposed to Adele to come in here, and we forgot all about grandmamma."

There was a slight pause after this announcement: of all things, Miss Eden most disliked the part of playing fault-finder in Mr. Churchill's presence. "I wish I had not gone out," she said at last, "my poor mother, how lonely she must have been."

"Shall I go and condole with her now," said Mr. Churchill, with a sympathizing look. "I suppose she is in the drawing-room as usual, is she not?" and he departed accordingly. Miss Eden lingered a moment before following him. "I did not think you would have been so neglectful, Rafe," she said reproachfully; "I would not have gone out had I not thought you would have kept your grandmamma company."

"Grandmamma might have come here, or rung the bell for us, if she wanted us," said Adele impatiently.

Her aunt, without replying, turned to leave the room ; but just as she reached the door she stopped, and said very sadly, "I would rather not hear you make any excuses ; try to be honest with yourself, Adele ;" and then without waiting for an answer went slowly away. Maud followed, and when she saw her aunt pass the drawing-room door and hurry to her own room, she ran after her, and with an impulse of irrepressible affection threw her arms round her, murmuring softly, "Oh, dear Aunt Harriet, don't look so miserable, I am sure Adele is really sorry."

"I wish I could think so," answered Miss Eden, trying to speak cheerfully, though her face was sad ; "but I don't understand her nor Rafe either now."

"No, they are not like what they used to be," said Maud, in sorrowful perplexity ; "but I can't think why."

"I think I can guess," her aunt said musingly, "but I must not tell you, my child. Run and show your flowers to your grandmamma, I will come in a minute." She kissed her very kindly, and then turned away and closed the door upon her. Thus excluded, Maud felt she could do nothing for her aunt but obey her, and accordingly ran away to the school-room to fetch her flowers. She found Rafe looking very miserable, and Adele very angry, they were talking in a low tone together, and took no notice of her. She only stayed to gather up her nosegay, and then went to the drawing-room, where

Mr. Churchill was doing his best to entertain her grandmamma, and where she and her flowers were both made most heartily welcome.

The two culprits, when left to themselves, began a dreary discussion of their various grievances ; and Rafe's complaints were mingled with a good deal of self-reproach, which did not serve to make his feelings less bitter. "I never shall get on with Aunt Harriet, never," he said, vehemently, "She despises me, I am sure ; thinks me weak and selfish ; and Mr. Churchill thinks the same. He generally has the forbearance to hold his tongue, I will say that for him : but I can read his opinion in his face."

"And when he is our uncle, he won't hold his tongue any longer," replied Adele ; "I can just fancy the lectures he will give us."

"Nonsense," said Rafe, impatiently, "he will do nothing of the kind ; he is too much of a man to scold ; he leaves all that to women."

"There, now you are taking his part, Rafe, as if you liked him."

"Taking his part ! stuff ! I only say what I know is true. I am not going to hear a man set down as everything that is bad merely because I don't happen to like him. You don't understand me, Adele,—nobody does—I sometimes fancy Mr. Churchill could if he would ; but it is too late to think of that now ; we have never got on from the first ; he was kind and cool, and I was ungrateful and rude, and once or twice he has said things to me which I never can or will forget or forgive either."

"What sort of things? I don't understand. You said just now he never lectured."

"No, he never does; these were not lectures, they were only single remarks; I can't talk about them, they make me too angry; but I will just tell you one, and you will see. It was a long time ago, when I had been very ill, and was getting better; it was a very hot disagreeable day, and I had dreadful pains in my head and back. Aunt Harriet was very kind in trying to settle my sofa cushions nicely, and doing everything she could to make me comfortable, and I know I behaved very like a bear in being as rude to her as I was. I should not have behaved so if I had been alone with her; but I saw it annoyed Mr. Churchill, and so I went on. I was curious to see how long he would bear it, and at last I saw his eyes beginning to flash; and presently he turned round and said, oh! in such a voice, not loud, or angry, but a very concentration of sternness, 'I am not going to bear this any longer, Rafe; your aunt is only too kind to you, and you are making your illness an excuse for the most selfish ingratitude and rudeness. If you were my nephew, I would not have allowed you to speak so for a moment.' I think I can hear him saying it now." And Rafe clenched his hands together in a perfect agony of pride.

"What did Aunt Harriet say?" asked Adele, much interested.

"Nothing to me; she said something to him in a low voice, trying, I think, to make excuses for

my behaviour. He answered her quite gently, and smiled ; but for all that I am sure he was very angry with me. I would not have been under his authority for something at that moment."

"No, indeed," said Adele, "but you know, Rafe, almost all men are angry when they hear a lady rudely spoken to. Papa once sent me to my room for a whole afternoon for having contradicted mamma."

"Then what would he say to the way *you* treat Aunt Harriet?" said Rafe, opening his eyes.

"I don't know ; he would be vexed enough, I daresay," replied Adele, with an uneasy look. "Don't let's talk about that. I want to hear when you first began to dislike Mr. Churchill. Have you known him ever since you came to live with Grandmamma?"

"Yes, I saw him directly I landed in England. Grandmamma came down to Southampton to meet us, and he came with her to take care of her and save her trouble. It was kind of him, and I know he was very good-natured, and managed things very nicely for her,—but somehow, his manner irritated me from the very first. We did not land till rather late, so we slept at an hotel that night, and I remember I could not eat anything that Grandmamma had ordered for my supper, and wanted something that she said would make me ill. I have often laughed since, to think of the way Mr. Churchill looked at me ; he seemed to expect us all to be as good and obedient as so many little

lambs, and was quite astonished to find we had wills of our own."

"Was he not brought up in some terribly strict way himself? I think I have heard Papa say so."

"Yes, I believe his father was a horrid cross old man, though *he* talks of him as if he had been an angel. He was in mourning for him when we came from Canada, and had a much sadder, more subdued manner than he has now, though every now and then he flashed out into fun and drollery. The girls took a fancy to him the first minute they set eyes on him, and that provoked me. I hated to see the way they made themselves happy and at home directly,—it seemed as if they forgot Papa and Mamma."

"You were very happy in Canada, were you not?"

"Yes, always, until Papa died; and I was quite well and strong until just before then,—as I never shall be again, I suppose;" and he sighed heavily as he spoke.

Adele threw into her bright eyes an expression of rather exaggerated sympathy. "You met with an accident, did you not?" she presently inquired.

"Yes, I was thrown out of a sleigh in coming from Niagara to Toronto, but it was not that alone which did the mischief. You know we were living at Toronto when papa was taken ill, but it happened that I was staying with some friends near Niagara, where I was to have remained all the winter; however, when papa became really in danger mamma wished me to come home, and Captain

Harley, an officer of papa's regiment, came to fetch me in his sleigh. We had a terrible journey, the roads in some places were so blocked up with snow as to be nearly impassable, and it was as much as Captain Harley's beautiful bays could do to drag the sleigh along. The cold was intense, piercing; I can remember to this day the freezing, numbing sensation that crept over me spite of all the furs in which I was wrapped. We did not stop at night, for it was only by pressing on that we could hope to get home in time for me to see papa alive. It was about midnight, and I was watching the Aurora Borealis which was, oh so beautiful, and listening to the eternal jingling of the sleigh bells, when all of a sudden there came a tremendous crash, and I was thrown out into the road. I don't know at all how things went then; all I remember is waking up from a sort of trance with an agonizing pain in my back and head, and a dimness before my eyes, and hearing a horrid nasal American voice say in answer to Captain Harley's soft one, 'Guess he ain't hooked it this time, he's a coming round famous, ain't you, young'un?' I soon found out that this elegant Yankee was the master of a small inn to which Captain Harley had carried me, and he contrived to patch up the sleigh for us so that we were able to go on the next morning, though I was no more fit to travel than to fly."

"I wonder Captain Harley took you."

"I am not sure that he would have if he had known the real state of the case, but he saw that I

had no bones broken, and I made the best of myself to him. So on we went, and we were only just in time, papa had just strength left to bless me and tell me to take care of mamma, and then—then he died—and I have been miserable ever since.”

Rafe’s voice died away into the deepest despondency, and Adele appeared sincerely moved; she drew nearer to him, and soothed him with some graceful French expressions of pity and tenderness, so caressing, that Rafe half smiled at them, and yet was comforted.

“And then did they find out how much you were hurt?” Adele asked after awhile with renewed curiosity.

“Yes, at least Captain Harley did; mamma was carried fainting to her room, and when she recovered could think of nothing but papa, but Captain Harley got the doctor who had been attending papa to examine me, and he said I had received a severe injury to the spine, from which he much feared I should never entirely recover. I went to bed, and it was weeks before I got up again; besides the pain in my back, I had rheumatic pains all over me, as bad as any old woman; I have them now sometimes you know, and Charlie is always laughing at me about my ‘rheumatiz.’”

“It is a wonder that you ever got as well as you are now.”

“Yes, I suppose it is; when I first came home to England I was obliged to lie down nearly all day, and could hardly walk any distance, but I have

been doctored and coddled into a passable amount of health and strength, and beyond that I suppose I shall never get."

"What do you think you shall be when you grow up?"

"What can I be? I should like to be an officer as papa was, but her Majesty knows better than to take people with damaged spines into her service. I am not good enough to be a clergyman, nor strong enough for a doctor; and as for being a lawyer, I am of the same opinion as Charles the First, who said he 'could not defend a bad cause nor yield in a good one,' so *that* profession would not suit me."

"You must be an author then; I am sure you can be, for I think you are quite a genius."

"A genius!" exclaimed Rafe, a mingled glow of enthusiasm, hope, and bashfulness rising to his pale cheek; "no, no, Adele, I am not that; no one ever hinted so even, but old Uncle Mortimer."

"Who is he? I never heard of him."

"He was my mother's uncle, and is therefore our great uncle; he is the only one of her relations that lives in England, and we hardly see anything of him. Once, however, he came to see us, and brought us some handsome presents, and before he went away he felt my head, for he has a perfect mania for phrenology, and said I ought to be a genius."

"So I am sure you are, you are like people I have read about in books who were so clever, and

whom their friends never understood. Who was that wonderful boy who killed himself? You are like him."

"Chatterton?" said Rafe shuddering, "Oh! no, I am not like him, and I don't dare to believe that I am a genius. I asked Aunt Harriet once if she considered me clever, and she said she thought I had 'very good abilities';—how I hate that expression!"

"It was just like her," said Adele, "she never will appreciate you. How capital it would be to escape from her altogether, and go and live with your old Uncle Mortimer. Why don't you write and tell him how miserable you are?"

"And complain of my father's mother and sisters whom he loved so much, and to whom he trusted me? no, never, Adele. I would rather die of stupidity here than throw myself on any one's charity, or make complaints of my own kith and kin. You don't understand me."

He drew himself up with a rather unnecessary haughtiness, corresponding to the high flown manner of his speech, but such honour and truth shone out of his beautiful eyes, that any chivalrous spirit seeing him would have claimed sympathy with it, and forgiven his tone of disdain. Adele neither understood, nor sympathized; she pouted her red lips, shrugged her little shoulders, and went away to prepare for tea, thinking to herself that it was very cross of Rafe to fire up, when she had been saying such sweet, flattering things to him.



CHAPTER VII.

MR. LASCELLES "AT HOME."

AFTER that grumbling afternoon things went on better for a time with poor Rafe: he was a good deal ashamed of having so given way to his discontented feelings, and made an inward resolution to struggle more against them for the future: in which good purpose he was unconsciously strengthened by a few innocent words from little Maud.

"Used not people long ago to get tired of being pages and esquires, and want to be knights before they might, don't you think, Rafe?" said she, breaking into one of his laments on the dulness of life.

"I suppose they did," he answered wearily; "but what has that to do with me?"

"Why—wasn't it what you call a probation they had to go through, to see if they were fit to be knights?"

"Yes; of course," was the somewhat impatient reply.

"Well then, I think this is your probation ; and if you pass through it well, you will be a knight some day."

"What *do* you mean ?" he said, looking at her in astonishment.

"I mean that you will be a Christian knight to fight against wrong not only in yourself (I know we must all do that), but in other people too. You shall write beautiful books, books to make people love honour and duty, and hate what is wicked and mean, and then you will be looked up to and listened to, and you will do so much good."

"What a precocious infant !" he said, smiling at her face of enthusiasm ; "what put all that in your head ?"

"Why you, Rafe," she answered earnestly ; "you, by things you have said. You sometimes tell me what you would write about 'if you were a man ;' I wish you would say 'when you are a man ;' I want you quite to determine to do all this."

"You are ambitious, Miss Puss," he said, pulling her down upon his knee, and twining her long silky curls round his thin fingers.

"Only for you," she answered eagerly ; "and I do so want you to be something great, Rafe. When I read about noble things in books, I always wish it was you who had done them."

"I !" His lips curled in self-contempt. "What can such a poor good-for-nothing as I do ?"

"You have talents," she said, "I know, I am sure of it ; other people think so beside me."

"Talents!" he answered bitterly; "what are they good for?"

"To serve God with," Maud answered in the low voice of reverence.

He was silent for a moment, but presently exclaimed, "Whatever I may do in the future, I see nothing worth doing at present. I don't know enough to write anything but stories, and I begin to think no one would care for them but you."

"Adele liked them."

"Adele! yes, she was amused with them; but what was best in them was just what she did not care about."

Maud could not deny this, but she went on hopefully: "What you have to do now, you know, Rafe, is to learn all you can, and be good and patient; you are not a knight yet, but you are going to be one."

"What would Aunt Harriet say if she heard all your fine notions?" said her brother with something between a smile and a sigh.

"I don't know," she answered blushing; "but I don't think she would be angry; only perhaps she would say I ought to go and practise, instead of chattering here."

"I dare say," said Rafe; "she is so painfully practical."

"That means she does instead of talking, doesn't it? Oh! then I must try and be 'practical' too."

He laughed. "You never will be, Lady Maud; you don't look like it."

"Oh, but I must," she replied with grave earnestness; "I shall never be good if I am not. Oh! please try to help me to be."

She disengaged herself from his embrace as she said this, and ran towards the door of the room, when behold there stood Aunt Harriet coming to seek her.

"I want you to come to your practising, Maud," was her not unexpected remark. "But how flushed you look," she added; "what have you been doing?"

"Only talking," said Maud in a penitent tone.

Aunt Harriet shook her head. "Such a chatter-box!" she said disapprovingly; "when will you learn, my little one, to act up to your favourite motto '*Faire sans dire*'?"

"I do mean to try," said the child very humbly, and without one attempt at self-excuse she glided from the room. Rafe stopped his Aunt as she was following her, to explain that Maud had not been chattering idly; and when they were both gone he thought long and deeply over the little maiden's words.

"If this is my probation," he said to himself, "it will not do to be impatient at it: if only I could know anything certain about the future!"

On that point speculations were vain; but he felt more hopeful and energetic than he had done for some time past, and did not treat Adele to any more complainings. He took up Latin and Greek with new ardour, and even astonished his aunt by

mastering some of the difficulties of the German grammar, to which she had in vain directed his attention before. He began to translate Schiller's "*Kampf mit den Drachen*" into English verse, and so won his Aunt's heart by learning some of her favourite German ballads, and consenting to look out in the dictionary for all the words he did not know, that she was beguiled into showing him some translations of Burger's "*Lenore*," Schiller's "*Der Taucher*," &c., which she had made in what she called her "juvenile days."

The idea of Aunt Harriet's ever having perpetrated verses filled him with amazement; but he was astonished and delighted to find how literally rendered, and yet how musical and spirited they were. Her manuscript book was quite a sight to admire, the German on one page and the translation on the other, written in her beautiful clear handwriting, with a broad margin on either side filled up by fanciful illustrations in the most delicate etching, the "*A. C. fecit*" at the foot showing them to be the work of Mr. Churchill. Rafe thought he heard a little sigh accompanying the "*No never*," with which his Aunt answered his question as to whether she had done anything of the kind more lately; but she added cheerfully, "*I have had better occupation for these last few years than writing verses, that used to fill up nicely my idle hours, but now I have no idle hours, and so much the better.*"

Adele was not altogether pleased at Rafe's sud-

den fit of industry: when pre-occupied by his studies, he was not so congenial a companion to her as he had been before; and she was thrown back upon Cissy and Maud. It must be confessed that they did not suit her particularly well, though she was obliged to admit that they were not "such babies" as she had at first chosen to imagine. They were both much better informed than she was; for Cissy, in her plodding way, had learned a good deal, and Maud was even precocious in intellect and attainments. They talked well and intelligently about books, and work, and poor people; but when it came to a question of dress and parties, they had nothing to say, and could only play the part of listeners. What vexed her most, in her intercourse with them, however, was the slight shade of disapproval which they sometimes could not help betraying at her ways of going on.

Maud had been constrained to confess to herself that Adele was "dreadfully naughty," and she occasionally let slip a hint of her opinion; and even without this, the mere sight of these two good, right-minded little girls was a constant reproach to Adele. It is true they were not always good; but their little occasional misdemeanours seemed nothing in comparison with her own graver faults. She saw them day after day reverent, self-denying, almost unhesitatingly obedient: sometimes she felt a wish to imitate them, more often she was annoyed at their superiority over herself,

and altogether she began to weary of her life at Abbotsbrook.

"Ce séjour est bien triste," she said to herself one morning, during the third month of her stay, and the sigh that followed this reflection was very deep drawn : so much so that it attracted the attention of Mr. Lascelles, who had come in for a few minutes' chat with her grandmamma ; and turning round, he gave a kindly look at her, saying pleasantly,

"Well, how does the little French lady get on in this quiet part of the world?"

"Pretty well—I mean very well," said Adele, correcting herself with a smile, though her first answer was the truest.

"I am afraid Adele finds her stay here rather dull," said Aunt Harriet, looking up ; "she is accustomed to more amusement and variety."

"Both good things in their way, but not to be found here," said the kind old Clergyman, with a comic shrug of his shoulders. "I have lived at Abbotsbrook for more than thirty years, and I must say I have always found it one of the quietest of quiet places. I am well contented that it should be so ; but still I think we ought to make some effort to entertain a stranger. What should you say"—this with a smile—"if I were to give a party?"

"Oh, Mr. Lascelles," said Anna, laughing, "who could you ask to it except the doctor?"

The old gentleman shook his head at her. "I

didn't expect that from you, Miss Anna; if you don't take care, you won't get an invitation."

"Oh, please, I must have one," said Anna, looking coaxing; "I would not miss your party for the world. When is it to be?"

"Well, it's no use giving a long invitation in this unfashionable locality,—suppose we say to-morrow."

"That's capital," said Anna, clapping her little white hands. "Adele, you ought to feel much honoured."

"It's got up expressly for you," said Mr. Lascelles, turning to her. "I had not the slightest intention of doing such a thing an hour ago. You must tell your cousins, with my love, that I hope they will all come, Dora and all; and you, too, Miss Anna, since you insist upon it. But not you," he added, turning round to Aunt Harriet, "for I don't think Mrs. Eden can well spare you; and besides, if you were to come, the children would behave too well."

"Why, Mr. Lascelles," said grandmamma, "I didn't know you patronised naughty children."

And Aunt Harriet, slightly colouring, exclaimed, "That is making me out very formidable."

"So you are," he said, with an arch expression breaking through the mildness of his face; "I think we all feel on our best behaviour when with you, except, perhaps, Arthur."

Miss Eden laughed good-humouredly, "I must be a very terrible person indeed, if that is the

case. What can I do to make myself less dreaded?"

He gave her a look in which respect, and a kind of paternal affection, were so mingled, that it told more than a hundred speeches.

"No need for any alteration," he said, as he rose to go; "I think we are all more than content with you now. But good-bye; I must be off to make arrangements for my party. It is to be unfashionably early,—five o'clock, punctually, remember, Miss Adele. I must go and secure my other guests: I haven't even invited Arthur yet, you know."

"Ah! what will he say to a party?" said Anna.

Mr. Lascelles only laughed in answer, and went away.

Directly he was gone, Adele flew to her cousins, whom she found all together in the schoolroom.

"What *do* you think?" she exclaimed. "Mr. Lascelles has been here, and he says he is going to give a party to-morrow evening in honour of me, and he has invited us all to it."

"Does he mean it?" said Rafe, incredulously.

"Oh, he does indeed, and he has asked Aunt Anna, but not Aunt Harriet; and fancy, he has been telling Aunt Harriet that she is 'formidable,' and that he is quite afraid of her."

Rafe, Maud, Charlie,—even Dora, laughed: but Cissy opened her eyes in utter amazement; "Mr. Lascelles afraid! why, he is so old!"

"Oh Cissy," said Maud, "of course he was only

in fun;" and then Cissy laughed too, but still looked somewhat puzzled.

A good part of that day and the next was spent in conjectures as to what "the party" would be like.

"I only wish Mr. Churchill was not going to be there," soliloquized Adele as she attired herself for the occasion, "why can't he come here and spend the evening with Aunt Harriet?"

But it was no use wishing, and a call from Cissy reminded her that she must hasten her toilette, if she wished to be punctual. When the young party were shown into the drawing-room at the Rectory, they found no one there but Mr. Lascelles and Mr. Churchill.

"My other guests are not so punctual as you," said the Rector, addressing Adele as the person chiefly concerned, "but I hope they will be here soon."

"Who are 'they,' I wonder?" said Rafe in an aside to Maud, and Anna looked up and smiled rather mischievously. At that moment an arrival was heard, and presently entered the Doctor.

Anna gave a little laugh of amusement and triumph, and glanced at Mr. Lascelles who endeavoured to look mysterious, and said quietly, "Wait and see."

Meanwhile the Doctor, a good-natured old man, with a round rosy face and very twinkling eyes, was shaking hands all round with an air of the utmost benignity. He was just beginning to rally Aunt

Anna (who was an especial favourite of his) on her mirthful appearance, when the drawing-room door was again opened, and the servant announced "Mr. and Miss Musgrave."

The new comers were a very tall grave looking gentleman, and a very tiny shy young lady.

Adele looked at them in some dismay, while the tall gentleman greeted her aunt and cousins as acquaintances, and introduced the young lady as his sister.

"Who are they?" she asked in a desponding tone of Rafe, when they were at a safe distance.

"The Rector of Naresborough, the next parish to this, and, as it seems, his sister; I suppose she is staying with him."

"Did you bring *it* with you?" asked Mr. Lascelles of Mr. Musgrave in a low tone.

"Oh yes, it's all safe," he replied, and the young lady was entering into some explanation, but was checked by her brother.

"You'll find this seat a comfortable one, Miss Musgrave," said Mr. Churchill, pitying her discomforted appearance, and indicating an easy-chair at Anna's side.

"Oh, thank you," and the shy young girl, somewhat reassured by his courteous tones, subsided into the offered seat, and taking little Dora who stood by, on her knee, began rather timidly to try to make friends with her. Finding presently that neither Anna nor Dora had any intention of devouring or otherwise maltreating her, she bright-

ened up a little, and soon felt emboldened to talk and even to laugh. Adele began to wonder if the party was complete; but once more the door opened, and following the announcement "Miss Victoria Lindsay," in rushed rather than walked a wild, joyous looking girl of about fifteen, whose first exclamation was, "O, Arthur, how good of you to think of me; I have been dying for some fun this month past;" to which Mr. Churchill quietly responded that he had not promised her any 'fun,' but that he was glad she was come.

She laughed, and running up to Mr. Lascelles kissed him, and told him he was "the dearest, best old uncle that ever was;" then with her hand still in his, turned round, and with indescribable coolness bestowed a sweeping glance on the assembled company. The Rector looked a kindly reproof,— "Come and let me introduce you to Miss Musgrave and the Miss Edens," he said, and accordingly "My niece Victoria" was presented in due form.

All went merrily after her arrival, she chattered and laughed and made friends with everybody, and soon confided to the young Edens the secret of how she came to be there.

"I am travelling about England with mamma," she said, "for mamma has been ill, and the doctors have ordered her constant change of air. We have stopped for a few days at Woodmere, and my cousin Arthur rode over there to see mamma this morning when I was out, and told her of Uncle Lascelles' party, and asked her to let me come, and

said I could sleep here ; of course I was overjoyed at the idea, so I came over in Aunt Clara's pony carriage, and Arthur is to take me back to-morrow. That is the full, true, and particular account of my appearance here ; and now '*me voila sur ma fin*,' or as the Frenchman in 'Lewis Arundel' translates it, 'behold, here I am on my end.' "

"Have you read 'Lewis Arundel?' Why, it is a novel, is it not?" inquired Maud in astonishment.

"Of course, and a very clever novel too, though not as first-rate as 'Frank Fairleigh.' Papa has them both, and heaps of other novels ; I have read nearly all he possesses, except one or two that were intolerably *slow*."

"Who is your papa?" asked blunt Charlie, and though Cissy checked him, Victoria heard, and answered carelessly, "Sir Reginald Lindsay, at your service."

"Then how comes Mr. Churchill to be your cousin?" Charlie further inquired.

"Because his mother and my mother were sisters, and I can tell you I am very proud of the relationship. Is he not a charming creature? so kind and so good-looking—so *fine* looking—'quite *distingué*,' as my good old governess says."

"How funnily you talk, aren't you afraid of him?" pursued Charlie looking her over, as if she were some newly discovered animal.

"Not a bit, why should I be? Here, Arthur!" raising her voice so as to reach his ears.

He came over to her, and she looked up at him

with a sort of saucy sweetness, and the inquiry, "Mayn't we have some fun?"

"It depends on what you call fun," he answered smiling; "all sorts of games are projected for after tea, but my uncle said this was the hour for getting acquainted."

"Nothing like fun for that," she returned, with an endeavour to look sapient; "but first I want to see some of your drawings; I know Uncle Lascelles has some of them. Do be kind, there's a good cousin, and let us all see them. I am sure you would like it, wouldn't you?" she added, turning to the young Edens.

There was a chorus of assent, even Rafe and Adele said yes. The artist himself looked doubtful; and Victoria, afraid of a negative, darted away to her uncle and whispered her request.

"Oh! yes, to be sure," was Mr. Lascelles' ready answer; "I have got a good many of his drawings, they are all in a portfolio in my study. You don't mind, Arthur? it would amuse these little people, you know. I will send for the portfolio;" and accordingly he rang the bell and despatched a servant in search of it.

"Take the sketches to the window and don't bore any of the elders with them," dictated Mr. Churchill to Victoria, and she did not venture to dispute his wishes, though she would have liked to display them in triumph to the whole assembled company. There was a rapturous murmur of delight among the children, when the portfolio was

really opened ; and they pounced upon the pictures with the most eager expectations of pleasure.

A rather fantastic group of peasantry was the first that came forth, and while Victoria lavished "beautifuls" and "charmings" upon it Rafe searched again and brought out something more to his taste.

"Only a face!" exclaimed Cissy.

"Lady Godiva," read Rafe from the paper.

"I like that," said Maud, "she looks so noble and pure."

"She's very like Aunt Harriet, that's all I know about it," broke in Charlie.

"Who is Aunt Harriet?" said Victoria quite aloud.

"Nonsense," said her cousin, who stood near, and taking his sketch, he put it quietly away.

"I never heard of an 'Aunt Nonsense' before," Victoria whispered to Adele, and a giggling ensued which Rafe fortunately hastened to put a stop to by showing them some beautiful illustrations of the ballad of "the Cid" which was the next find in the well-filled portfolio.

"What would I not give to draw like this, but I have no copies or anything," sighed he to his sisters.

Cissy unbounded in her belief in his capabilities answered warmly, "I am sure you could soon learn to draw, you are so clever."

"What is the question, Cissy?" said Mr. Churchill, approaching.

"Why, Rafe says he would give anything to draw like this, and I say I am sure he could

soon learn to draw, if he had copies, of course, I mean."

" 'This' is nothing so very much, as you would know if you were more accustomed to judge of drawings," Mr. Churchill answered smiling; "but Rafe is welcome to have any of these to copy if he thinks them worth the trouble."

"Always excepting Lady Godiva, I suppose," said the naughty Victoria; but she shrank beneath his look of cold reserve, and when Charlie whispered, "Aren't you a little bit afraid of him, *now*," buried her rosy face in the portfolio, and offered no reply.

More and more drawings were drawn forth of various excellence. Some the mere fancies of an idle hour hastily committed to paper, others finished performances carefully drawn and coloured; in all, there were marks of quite unusual talent, and the young people in their admiration could find nothing to criticise. At last came one which was the occasion of a grand outcry. "It's Maud, I declare!" exclaimed the children with one voice, all but Maud herself, who, with the utmost sincerity, declared it much too pretty.

"Why you *are* very pretty," said Victoria, fixing her great bright eyes on the little maiden's blushing face.

"No flattery allowed," said her cousin, and taking Maud's hand he drew her out of the reach of the gaze with so kind a manner, that Victoria declared herself "positively jealous."

"Is it really me, that pretty picture?" said Maud, looking up doubtfully in his face.

"Really it is," he answered in a tone of amusement: "I was thinking of making a copy of it for your grandmamma, but if I do I must tell her to put it where you will not see it, for since you admire it so much I am afraid it would be dangerous for you to look at it often."

She laughed at his playful speech, but it was a relief to the deepening crimson of her cheeks when tea was announced, and a general move was made. A perfect stream of talk flowed round the tea-table, the grave looking Rector of Naresborough had dropped his stiff manner, and was getting quite facetious; his shy sister was beginning to seem quite at her ease; and as for Victoria, the little Edens all agreed they had never seen any one so lively. Her clear, fearless voice and ringing laugh were heard at every pause of the conversation, and she might really have got somewhat beyond bounds if she had not occasionally been called to order by her cousin, who, with his firm tone and good-humoured smile, put a stop to her wild sallies when he thought they were going too far.

"He is quite my Mentor," she observed in a laughing whisper to Adele. "Mamma told him I was a naughty wild thing, so he promised to look well after me."

"He is certainly keeping his promise," was the reply.

"Yes, and I like him to do so. I should not

mind if I had him to set me to rights always, only I am afraid he would soon get tired of the task. I do just as I like at home, for Mamma is nearly always ill. Papa is always busy; and I don't mind my governess one bit."

"And have you no brothers and sisters?" asked Adele.

"I have two brothers, but they are at Eton, and in the holidays they persuade me to join their pranks till they make me as mad as themselves. I have established a reputation for doing everything that I ought not to do. I think no one but Arthur ever expects me to behave myself. He stayed with us once at our country place; and he wanted me to teach in a Sunday school, and do all sorts of good things."

"And don't you?" said Cissy, who was on the other side of her.

"Now and then; but I have no one to show me how."

"Isn't there a clergyman there?" Cissy asked again.

"Oh yes, but he's cross; at least he seems so to me; he won't let me teach the way I like, and he says I give the children books that he can't approve, and he is always dictating to me."

"How disagreeable!" said Adele sympathizingly, but Cissy, though with a blush and some confusion of manner, ventured to say, "Isn't it right for him to dictate if he has the management of the school? Perhaps if you would let him he would show you how to teach nicely."

Adele shrugged her shoulders and Victoria laughed.

"Cousin Arthur," she said, raising her voice a little, "did you make acquaintance with Mr. White our rector, when you were at Mount Lindsay?"

"Yes; what about him?" said her cousin, looking up.

"Why, that he is 'more odious than ever, and I can't bear him," was her unexpected reply.

"Have you finished your tea?" he said, as if he did not choose to hear, congratulating himself inwardly that the two clergymen were so deeply engaged in conversation as not to have noticed Victoria's disrespectful remark. She blushed and swallowed in silence what remained on her plate, and then as every one else had done, they all rose from table.

After tea there occurred a sudden disappearance of Mr. Lascelles and Mr. Musgrave, and presently Mr. Churchill was called away also.

"They have some secret between them, I think," said the little doctor, rubbing his hands: "suppose we play some trick in their absence."

"Oh that wouldn't be right," said Cissy, who took the suggestion literally, and all the others laughed at her simplicity.

Miss Musgrave struck up a conversation with Maud, and seemed completely fascinated by her beauty and modesty. "What a sweet little girl your sister is," she said to Rafe, as Maud ran away to do something for little Dora.

"Maud do you mean?" inquired Rafe, much gratified.

Miss Musgrave assented warmly, and though she little guessed it, she had made Rafe her friend for life. They were still conversing together on the pleasant theme of Maud's perfections, when Mr. Lascelles came up and asked Miss Musgrave to go with him to the dining-room, where there was something he wanted her opinion about. Mr. Churchill soon made his appearance, and Charlie set upon him to know what the mystery was, but nothing could be extracted from him but a series of droll and mysterious looks and nods, calculated to heighten curiosity, rather than satisfy it.

"What has become of Victoria?" he inquired presently, looking round the room, but not discovering her.

"She is here hiding her blushes," said a sweet merry voice, and Victoria's arch countenance was seen peeping from behind the sofa.

"Oh, Arthur," she added, jumping up and laying her hand caressingly on his arm; "are you very angry with me for what I said at tea?"

He bent his head down to her, and answered in so low a tone that no one but she could hear. She coloured scarlet at his words, but looked up at him so affectionately and penitently, that Cissy and Maud though rather horrified at her before, took a liking to her from that moment.

"We are all ready," said Mr. Lascelles, appearing at the door; and under his guidance the

whole party proceeded down stairs to the dining-room.

It was a large room, dimly lighted, with rows of chairs placed at one end, while at the other hung a mysterious white sheet. Dora clung closely to her aunt's side in alarm, but Adele with a very wise air, gave a reassuring whisper of "dissolving views." A sort of dark shadow was seen to flit across the sheet. "Oh, dear," cried little Dora. "Oh, take me away."

"Nonsense, baby," said Charlie, in the most manful tones, but feeling a little mystified himself.

"All right, Dora," said Mr. Churchill's cheerful voice from the other side of the sheet, and in another moment the little one's fear was changed into the most eager delight, for the black shadow had disappeared, and in its stead was a beautiful glowing landscape, bright with sunshine.

"The Bay of Naples," said Mr. Musgrave from behind it.

"How pretty," exclaimed Cissy, true to her character, and all the epithets of admiration were exhausted by the other spectators.

But ere they had finished admiring, the lovely scene began to change,—dark massive pillars took the place of azure sky and golden sea, and presently Mr. Musgrave's voice was heard again,—
"The interior of S. Mark's at Venice."

It would be tedious to relate what was by no means tedious to see—the constant succession of beautiful pictures on the magic sheet.

To the little Edens who lived quite out of the way of London sights, dissolving views were a delightful novelty, and Mr. Lascelles' party was unanimously declared to be one of the most successful treats that had ever been given.

"Isn't Mr. Musgrave a charming man to ask to a party?" asked Mr. Lascelles playfully of Adele when they had returned to the drawing-room.

"Oh, do those pretty pictures belong to him?" she inquired.

"Yes; they were given to him for his school children's benefit, and he is kind enough to extend the amusement to others. Abbotsbrook school children are to have a sight of them some day."

"How did he bring the sheet?" said Dora, in a puzzled voice.

"Walked over in it," replied Victoria, with mischievous gravity.

Involuntarily the children glanced at Mr. Musgrave's tall gaunt form; pictured it to themselves enfolded in the sheet, and overcome by the absurdity of the idea, burst into a fit of laughter, from which Cissy and Maud were the first to recover.

"You naughty child," said the kind old rector, shaking his head at his niece, and trying to look very grave; "it is well Mr. Musgrave was out of hearing of your impertinence."

"I shall begin to think you incorrigible, Victoria," said her cousin, endeavouring to suppress a smile.

"No, indeed," she answered, "if you would take me in hand I should turn out quite a model young lady."

"Why don't you take yourself in hand? that would be a great deal better," was his quiet rejoinder. But she made a kind of funny pirouette, concluding in a curtsy, and assured him with mock solemnity that the task was quite beyond her.

"Little madcap," he said, turning away, and going up to Anna, he proposed a game at "Animal, vegetable, or mineral," which was known to be a favourite with the young Edens.

Everyone seemed to approve of the notion, and all joined in the game but Mr. Lascelles and Mr. Musgrave, who seated themselves together on the sofa, and began a discussion upon "church rates."

Among the children, Rafe and Maud gave both the best guesses, and the best subjects for guessing, and indeed they outshone everyone except Mr. Churchill. The doctor professed to have forgotten all about history, and amused the young people by pretending to think of the poison with which fair Rosamond murdered Queen Elizabeth! An idea which, after much fruitless conjecture, he was obliged to divulge, since as little Dora explained to her own satisfaction, "no one could guess a thing that never happened."

The play was kept up with spirit until supper was announced, and after supper a game at "snap-dragon" agreeably concluded the evening's enter-

tainments. Miss Musgrave declared at parting, that she had "enjoyed herself exceedingly;" the young Edens and their aunt loud in their gratitude to Mr. Lascelles, departed under escort of the doctor, and Victoria twined one arm within her cousin's, and strolled up and down the long drawing-room with him, exclaiming that she had been "as happy as possible, and should never forget that evening."

"Though there was no fun," was the smiling rejoinder.

"I don't know about that," she answered, "but at any rate there was something better. Oh, Arthur, I like those Edens so much, Rafe and Maud especially."

"And what about little Miss Adele?"

"Oh, I don't like her as well as the others, though she was the most friendly to me; she is conceited I think, though she has not half so much reason to be as that lovely little Maud."

"She has not had such good teaching as Maud has," said her cousin.

"Who teaches Maud then; is it that Aunt Harriet they talked about?"

"Yes, she has almost the entire charge of these children; her mother is a great invalid, and her sister is so young."

"Is *she* old then?"

"No;" and the young man laughed; "she is about four and twenty."

"Is she really like Lady Godiva?"

"Perhaps so, though it did not strike me when I did it. I should like you to know her, she would do you a great deal of good."

"And you think I need it? Well, I know I am a naughty, tiresome thing; I wish I could be as good as that modest, gentle Maud; you would be fonder of me if I were, would you not?"

"Good-night," he said, holding out his hand with a smile. "I must be going home, and it is time you were in bed. Improve first, and then I will tell you how I feel about you."

She bade her uncle and him good-night, and departed to bed very obediently. Next day she returned to her mother to be indulged and petted as heretofore, but she registered in silence a resolve to be more earnest in well doing, and "*that* evening," as she called it, she really never did forget.



CHAPTER VIII.

REMINISCENCES.

"MAYN'T we make a great many things, Aunt Harriet?" such were the words that greeted Rafe's ears as he entered the schoolroom one bright frosty afternoon about a week after the party, and found Maud and her aunt busily employed in turning out the contents of a large work table, which was the great repository for all working materials.

"We shall not have time to make very many, I think," Aunt Harriet replied, and as she raised her head and saw Rafe, she added, "I am afraid for once we must give up our German, Rafe, I am going to be so busy."

"Very well," he said, in a dubious tone between relief and disappointment, and with a weary yawn he laid down Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell," which he had brought in his hand.

"I am sorry," said his aunt looking at him very kindly, as if she feared he might be vexed, "but I am enlisted to work for Johnnie Andrews and his

sister, who are going the day after to-morrow to an uncle in Yorkshire, who intends, I believe, to adopt them."

"And who knows nothing about children, and is, oh! such a funny old man," interrupted Maud; "he has been very kind, and Mrs. Andrews says she knows it is for their good, but she is quite sorry to part with them, and she wants to set them up in clothes before they go, because she does not believe the old uncle will know a bit what to get them."

"So you are going to help, I suppose," said Rafe, endeavouring to be interested; "but how sorry Cissy will be to lose Johnnie Andrews."

"She will indeed," said Miss Eden compassionately; "she is looking quite doleful at the idea of it. I proposed to her to make a pinafore for him as a sort of comfort, and then it occurred to me that we might make a frock and some other things for Fanny too."

"And I am sure," said Maud, "Mrs. Andrews will be very glad, for Mr. Lascelles says she is poorer than many who make more complaint, and she has so many children of her own that she cannot have much time to work for Fanny and Johnnie, though she has been very kind to them, considering she is only their aunt."

"Isn't it usual for aunts to be kind to their nieces, Pussy?" said Aunt Harriet smiling, and the impulsive child jumped up, and throwing her arms round her neck, inflicted on her more kisses than

she was quite prepared for; saying eagerly, "Oh dear, *dear* Aunt Harriet, I quite forgot, but you are not *only* an aunt to us, you are a great deal more."

Aunt Harriet laughed, and extricated herself gently from the embrace. "I want you to carry these chintzes to Aunt Anna," she said, "and to ask her which she thinks would be prettiest for a frock."

Maud took the rolls of stuff and hurried away with them, but knocked down some things off the table on her way.

"Maud, Maud, come back," called her aunt; "come and pick up those things."

"Won't it do when I have been to Aunt Anna?" said Maud, pausing in the doorway.

"It would do for the things, but it would hardly be obedient," was the good-humoured yet decided reply, and Maud came back blushing to do as she was bid.

"For once I wish I could work," said Rafe, as he watched his aunt busily arranging her materials on the table while he was lolling on a chair, looking particularly unoccupied. She passed her hand over his hair, and smiled brightly down at him as she said, "Do you know I have sometimes wished you were a girl, Rafe, that I might make you happy with a needle and a piece of work, instead of seeing you pining for something to do."

"I wish I had anything to do, I can't go on with my drawing now," he said gloomily, "there's something in the copy I don't understand."

"Why don't you take it to Mr. Churchill, and ask him about it?"

"Because I have no wish to trouble him."

He said it in a proud, disagreeable sort of tone, and a rosy flush passed up into his aunt's face as she turned away.

"Aunt Anna has chosen this chintz," said Maud, flourishing it in the air as she ran into the room; "and Cissy and Adele are coming as soon as they have got their thimbles, and oh! Charlie is making such a thing out of a bit of wood, and he calls it a ship, and says it is for Johnnie Andrews."

"I heard him say he was going to make one," said her aunt, looking amused; "and as it was kindly meant, I did not discourage him; perhaps, Rafe, you might give him some hints about the shaping of it, or else we shall certainly have to write on it 'this is a ship.'"

"Charlie is not very fond of being interfered with," said Rafe, as he rose unwillingly.

"No, I know that, but suppose you ask him to bring his ship here, and then I can second your advice a little."

Her wish was executed, and Charlie installed himself in a seat near the window with his tools spread ostentatiously around him, while the party of workers assembled at the table, Cissy and Maud making impossible estimates of what their industry might achieve, and Adele resigning herself to the task, not wishing to seem ill-natured.

Rafe divided his time between a story book and

Charlie's carpentering, but his hints were certainly not taken in very good part. The little carpenter was perfectly satisfied with his own work, and answered all his brother's criticisms as snappishly as he dared in his aunt's presence, so that the poor ship bid fair to be as unshapely as ever.

It was to Rafe quite an unusual relief when the old butler popped his head in at the door, and saying, "Mr. Churchill asked for the young ladies, so I thought I might show him in here, Miss," ushered the aforesaid gentleman into the room.

He was too accustomed a visitor for his presence to make any confusion in the busy circle; he entered into the thing in a minute, rejoiced Cissy's heart by praising Johnnie Andrews, applauded the young ladies' industry, and then turned his attention to the ship. By what magic did it begin to look so really shipshape under his direction, when all Rafe's efforts had been so entirely in vain? Rafe looked on and wondered, while Charlie, restored to good humour, worked away with all his might.

"All this industry is against me unfortunately," said Mr. Churchill, after a few minutes, looking up from his employment of shaping a mast, "I came to beg for some companions in a walk to Naresborough."

"Oh *must* you go to-day?" asked Maud in melancholy accent, while little Dora called out,

"you'd better 'tay and help us, Mr. Churchill," to which he jestingly replied, that "he had left his thimble at home."

"And you really wish to go to-day?" said Miss Eden.

"I really do, for I promised Musgrave that I would, and I also promised *Miss* Musgrave that I would try to get some of your flock to go with me."

"I should like to go," was on Cissy's lips, but she remembered Johnnie Andrews and was silent.

"Oh, please mayn't I go, Aunt Harriet?" said the more impulsive Maud.

"And let Fanny Andrews go without her pinafore for the sake of your own enjoyment?" questioned her aunt gravely.

"Oh, I would work very hard all the evening; I would indeed," she answered. "Mr. Churchill," with an appealing glance at him, "you would like me to go with you, wouldn't you?"

"Let her go, Harriet," he said with a very persuasive look.

Miss Eden smiled sweetly in answer, but did not yield. "I do not forbid her to go," she said quietly, "but if she does, it will not be with my approval."

"And I can't take her without it," he said with a comical look of disappointment, a decision to which Maud felt compelled to assent.

After a little debate, it was settled that Rafe and Charlie should go, the latter consenting to

abandon his carpentering since he had so little to do that he could finish it on his return. As Mr. Churchill shook hands with Cissy and Maud, he said kindly, "I wish I could take you both with me, but you are better employed," adding after a moment's thought, "and I don't know that you, Cissy, even wanted to come."

"If Cissy did not ask to go, it was because she thought she ought not, not because she did not wish to," said Aunt Harriet, coming to the rescue of the ever-modest Cissy.

Mr. Churchill smiled approvingly, and Maud with crimson cheeks, looked up and said, "I know I ought not to have asked to go, it was very selfish of me, Cissy would never have done it."

"Maud has come round to the right side already, you see; your teaching is not lost upon her," was King Arthur's good-natured comment to Miss Eden on this speech.

"I am very glad she has in this instance," was the reply. "I was afraid she was thinking me a cruel tyrant, and herself a poor little martyr."

"I don't a bit," said Maud, nestling up to her; "not *now*; at first I thought you were cross, Aunt Harriet."

"What a terrible person you are, Harriet," said Mr. Churchill, much amused; "I really must take myself off with all speed, lest you should condemn me to the performance of some disagreeable piece of duty, and I should have to think you cross, which I have never done yet."

Miss Eden smiled, and stroked Maud's hair with her soft white hand. As she stood there with that smile upon her face, she looked so gentle, so kind, so anything but cross, that a better denial of such an accusation could not have been found.

Both Mr. Churchill and Rafe were thinking of her, though in different ways, as they pursued their walk together, and at first neither of them spoke. Presently however, Mr. Churchill called to Charlie, who was running on in front, and advised him to spare some of his strength for the walk home. Rather unwillingly Charlie stopped in his career.

"I daresay *you* liked running when you were a boy: didn't you, Mr. Churchill?" he inquired with somewhat of an injured air.

"Very much, and I don't dislike it now; I ran nearly all the way to Church last Wednesday, fearing I should be late for the service, and I thought it rather good fun."

"Oh!" said Charlie, in irrepressible admiration, "you're first-rate, Mr. Churchill. I'm so glad you're not too grand to know what fun means. Rafe pretends he doesn't."

"I see no fun in tearing about the garden, and racing up and down stairs, and romping about all day, as Charlie does," said Rafe, contemptuously.

"It's much better than sitting humbugging over a book though, isn't it, Mr. Churchill?" was Charlie's indignant rejoinder.

"Well, I am not sure I know the precise meaning of humbugging over a book ; if you mean reading it, I should think *that* the higher pleasure of the two."

"Oh ! so I have got you both against me," said Charlie. "I forgot that you were a bookworm too, Mr. Churchill. You worked awfully hard at college, didn't you ? Took honours and all that ?"

"I worked pretty hard, certainly, but I had some fun too, Charlie—boating, cricketing, &c."

"Aunt Harriet did not tell us about the fun," said Charlie, reflectively.

"Indeed ; what did she tell you ?"

"Why, she was talking about being energetic, setting a task before one, and going through with it, and all that sort of thing ; and she told us about a number of great men, who had been very energetic, and had won all sorts of grand rewards, but I said the great men were all dead and buried, and I should never see any of them, and that I would rather she gave me an instance of some one that I knew. So then she told me how you determined to distinguish yourself at Oxford to please your father, though you were not naturally fond of study ; and how you persevered, and worked hard, and got on so famously that your father was quite delighted. I liked hearing it so much."

"Thank you," said Mr. Churchill smiling, "but I am sorry for your taste, Charlie, if you do not

care to hear of the deeds of great men that are gone."

"Oh, I do care to hear of them, but not as an example for me, they seem all so far off. I can't go raving about the Knights of Malta and William Tell, and Bayard, and Arnold Von Winkelried, as Rafe does, but I like hearing about some of the fellows, Nelson for instance. A boy that did not know what fear was, *must* have been a brick, mustn't he?"

"A splendid fellow!" said Mr. Churchill, enthusiastically.

"Where did you learn those slang words, Charlie?" said Rafe.

"'Brick,' do you mean? Why I have seen it in books, and I have heard Mr. Harcourt say it. Has Mr. Harcourt got his commission yet, Mr. Churchill?"

"I believe so, but he has not joined yet; I dare say he will look very well in his guardsman's uniform. Do you mean to be a soldier, Charlie?"

"Either that or a sailor. I had some thoughts of running away to sea last week, after I had been reading 'Tales of Shipwrecks,' only I thought how you would all cry when you found me gone, and so I had not the heart to."

"You conceited little creature," said Mr. Churchill laughing, "how do you know we shouldn't have said 'good riddance of bad rubbish?'"

"Oh, I know better," said the boy self-complacently; "but I say, Mr. Churchill, if I were you, I

would get a commission, you might be a great general some day like your namesake, the Duke of Marlborough."

"Ah but you see you would all cry so if I were to go," said Mr. Churchill, with arch mimicry of the little fellow's conceited manner; "besides my tastes have never been decidedly military, though as a child I remember I took great delight in a wooden sword and a drum."

"Oh! I know," screamed Charlie in high glee, "Mr. Harcourt told me, you used to have such funny plays, and once you were King Edward, and Mr. Harcourt and Uncle Archie were the seven burghers of Calais; and they came with ropes round their necks and laid some keys at your feet, and you were just going to chop their heads off with your sword, when in came Aunt Harriet as Queen Philippa, and threw herself on her knees before you, and begged for their lives, and so you pardoned them, and you all shook hands, and got up and danced the highland fling, and Mr. Harcourt threw the keys over his head into the moat, and they were lost; and then they turned out to be some keys of your papa's that he was very particular about, and your tutor was so angry, and was going to punish Mr. Harcourt for it, when you said it was your fault because you had lent them to him, and so begged him off, and were punished yourself instead. Oh I know all about that."

"So it seems, and better than I do myself, for I had almost forgotten all about it. My tutor was a

very particular person, I don't think you would have liked him much, Charlie."

"I am sure I shouldn't, I hate the very idea of him, because he was so cross about those stupid old keys. I suppose you had to be a wonderfully good boy, hadn't you?"

"I ought to have been, but I don't suppose I was, for I remember my father and tutor used often to impress upon me the reverse. During the two years that Harcourt stayed with us I was as wild as I could well be, we were always at some mad frolic or other."

"And Aunt Harriet and Uncle Archie used to be invited to spend the day with you. Poor Uncle Archie! I wish he was not dead."

Mr. Churchill's face grew grave; he was silent a little while, thinking of this Archie, his former playmate, and Miss Eden's favourite brother, who had died of decline at eighteen years of age.

"Oh I should so like to have seen you," Charlie went on presently, "when you were a little boy with your hair all curling down your back, and you used to come into Church holding by your papa's hand; you were always very good in Church I know, one of the almshouse women told me so, and I know another thing about you, how you used to read the Bible to her mother who was an old blind woman. She (I mean the daughter) said the other day that Rafe and I were very nice young gentlemen, but that she should never see such another as you."

"Really, I had no idea any one held such a flattering opinion of me, my impression was that, as a child, I was always getting into scrapes."

"Oh that was because every one was so strict to you; that old woman, Mrs. Fearnley, told me all about it: she said she was a servant at your house when you were little, and that she was very fond of you indeed, because you were so gentle and kind to every one weaker than yourself, and so brave and truth-telling, 'just a little too high-spirited,' she says, that was your only fault."

"A mild term for passion and wilfulness, Charlie."

"Nonsense," said Charlie indignantly, "you were very good *indeed*, only people were unkind to you and would never let you have your own way; why your father did not like you even to be merry, he *must* have been cross!"

"Hush! Charlie, is that a thing to say to me?" said Mr. Churchill sternly.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," faltered the boy, blushing.

"Very well, but do not speak so disrespectfully again; you can be no judge of my father's conduct; he was in ill health, and had had many sorrows in his life, so it was no wonder that he did not relish the perpetual mirth of a giddy child. I only wish I had understood that then."

"But you could not help being merry, Mrs. Fearnley says you were the most cheerful young gentleman she ever saw, you used to go singing about the house and dancing up and down the

stairs, and never seemed to know what dulness was; you were scarcely ever quiet, except when you were drawing; she says drawing was your chief delight."

"So it was, and my father encouraged my taste for drawing most kindly, giving me the advantage of first-rate lessons, and everything needed for my progress."

"Why," said Rafe, who had been listening attentively, without speaking a word, "I thought he burnt your drawings, and would not let you do any, I am sure grandmamma told me so: one day I asked you to show me some of the drawings you did when you were quite a boy, and you said you couldn't. I was going to ask you why not, when she stopped me, and afterwards she told me that your father had burnt them all."

Mr. Churchill bit his lip, and looked as if he thought people were somewhat too communicative about his affairs. Presently, however, he said, "I do not want you to run away with a false notion about that; what I have told you of my father's encouraging my taste for drawing is strictly true, he did do so up to the time I was about sixteen, and then I displeased him, and he burnt my sketches as your grandmamma said, but it was—it must have been—my own fault."

Rafe's generous feelings were touched. "He would rather take all the blame on himself than that we should think ill of his father;" he said to himself, "I like that, but I wish I knew the rights of it all."

"Mr. Churchill," he said aloud, in a tone more pleasing and respectful than usual, "I remember hearing once that you wanted to be an artist; do you mind my asking if it was true?"

Mr. Churchill debated with himself a minute, then he said, "As you have heard part, perhaps you had better hear all, though it is a subject I scarcely ever speak of. I did want to be an artist, it was the great desire of my life; for the permission to devote myself entirely to art, I would gladly have submitted to any privation; my father's wishes lay naturally in another direction; he thought an artist's profession degrading to a Churchill, and could not understand how I could wish to be anything more than the simple country gentleman, which my ancestors had been before me. In fact when at last with much hesitation I confided to him my wishes and schemes, they appeared to him as insane folly for which there could be no excuse; he did not know, how could he? that to those who really love art, it becomes—but no matter;" and he broke off suddenly, his eyes gleaming, his cheeks glowing with an enthusiasm which Rafe could admire, though he did not altogether understand it.

"And was it then that your drawings were burnt?" said Charlie, who took a matter-of-fact view of the case, and did not want to hear anything about art in the abstract.

"Yes, my father insisted on my giving up all idea of being an artist, but I thought that impos-

sible and said so ; I suppose that vexed him further, as seeming like disobedience ; so he had all my sketches thrown into the fire, and forbade me ever to touch pencils or colours again."

"And what did you do ? weren't you in a dreadful rage ?" said Charlie ; "I know I should have threatened to kill myself, if it had been my pictures that had been burnt."

"How sensible and dutiful that would have been !" said Mr. Churchill with a smile, whose sweetness showed how completely he had forgiven his father the cruel disappointment of his youth. "No, no, Charlie, I never indulge in tragedy ; whatever I might feel, I said nothing. I am not going to tell you how miserable I was ; it is all over now ; the chief thing to regret is that my obvious unhappiness was a grief to my father ; it seemed like a reproach to him, which you may believe I never meant."

"Oh, you're *too* good !" exclaimed the boy, his face burning with indignation ; "I never could be as good as that, if I were to try all my life ; but how did you persuade your father to let you go on drawing again ?"

"I didn't persuade him."

"Then who did ?"

"Your aunt, she was a great favourite of his ; and when a year had passed without my having touched pencil or brush, she represented to him one day how ready I was to obey him, and how safely I might be allowed to resume my draw-

ing, as an amusement merely ; she even said something about my former desire, but that he would not hear of ; and when he gave me permission to draw and paint again as I had been used to do, he first exacted a promise that I would never, under any circumstances, take up art as a profession."

"That must have been worse than anything," said Rafe.

"It was, it seemed like giving up my last hope ; but there was no help for it, submission was my duty."

He closed his lips resolutely when he had said this, as if nothing should ever tempt him to dishonour his father's memory by a single complaint ; then shaking back his brown curls from off his brow, and apparently dismissing at the same moment all his painful thoughts, he challenged Charlie to a race, and set off with almost boyish glee.

"He's a strange being," soliloquized Rafe as he walked soberly along ; "but he's worth ten of ordinary people ; I like him, and I don't like him ; but if he were always as he is to-day, I think I should end by liking him thoroughly. (I would never tell him so though.) How much Charlie seems to know about him ; I suppose I might have heard it too, but I always thought that Mrs. Fearnley such a dreadful prosy old woman. I wonder whether she told Charlie any more."

His curiosity was not long left unsatisfied, for when they arrived at Naresborough they were told that Mr. and Miss Musgrave were at the school-

house; and while Mr. Churchill walked on there to meet them, he insisted on Rafe and Charlie stopping at the Rectory, as he feared, though he did not say so, that Rafe would be overtired. They were no sooner left alone in Mr. Musgrave's comfortable sitting-room than the talkative Charlie began,—“Isn't Mr. Churchill a famous fellow, Rafe? I think, although he won't let me say so, that his father was horribly cross, horribly! I heard all about it from Mrs. Fearnley the day Aunt Harriet sent me to her with some arrowroot: she said his father used to be angry with him about the slightest thing, and his tutor was worse still. And for all they said and did, he was never sulky or discontented, but as merry and good-humoured as possible—“as blithe as a bird,” Mrs. Fearnley says, only that year when they would not let him draw, he pined and pined, and seemed to care about nothing, except just going through his duty, so as to satisfy his father.”

“Poor fellow!” sighed Rafe, and to Charlie's surprise he listened eagerly to some further particulars of Mr. Churchill's boyish days; becoming so much absorbed by the subject, that when gentle Miss Musgrave arrived, and tried to make conversation, his answers were absent and inattentive, and his manner so abrupt as to provoke a flash of displeasure from Mr. Churchill's observant eyes.

He was disappointed to find Mr. Churchill had no intention of making any further confidences, and thought the discussion on ancient and modern

heroes, which went on during the walk home, and which Charlie seemed to find so amusing, insufferably tedious; though at another time he would have entered into it with spirit. To his discontented mind Mr. Churchill's reserve was a fresh injury, and yet all the while he admired both it and him.



CHAPTER IX.

AUNT HARRIET.

"WILL Aunt Harriet's baby ever grow into a sensible girl?" This was said to Dora, who was hiding a very tearful face in her aunt's lap, and Rafe, who had just come into the room, looked up, and said smiling, but a little nervously, "I want to speak to you, Aunt Harriet, when Dora has left off being lachrymose."

"Very well; I will attend to you as soon as I have dismissed my little crybaby," Miss Eden replied. "Come, Dora, look up and smile, my child, we have had quite enough tears for one day."

Dora tried to obey, but the smile was rueful to see, and was followed by a fresh burst of passionate sobs. Miss Eden waited gravely and patiently till the emotion should subside, but it did not, and so with a gentle "I cannot let my baby behave in this way when she knows it is wrong," she took the weeping child by the hand, and led her from the room.

In a few minutes she returned alone. "Well, Rafe," she said, sitting down and taking up her work as if prepared to listen.

"What a deal of trouble we give you, Aunt Harriet."

"Is that what you wanted to say to me?" she answered, with a very bright smile.

"No, oh, no, but Dora made me think of it: what was she crying about?"

"Only at something Adele said to her; the little lady is proud, as you may have observed, and Adele's satirical remarks wound her. I had hoped she was getting over these crying fits, both for her own sake and mine, for to tell you the truth, Rafe, I do dislike crying more than anything."

"I should think so," said Rafe; "had she stopped crying when you came away?"

"No, but I thought it better to leave her alone for a little while. I said I would go back in ten minutes, and see if she were good, so please make haste and say what you want to say."

Rafe did not seem disposed to make haste; they were alone, and there was nothing to prevent his speaking freely, but he both looked and felt embarrassed.

"Aunt Harriet," he said at last, "there is something that I think I ought to tell you, but I am afraid you will be vexed—." He stopped, hoping she would speak, but she only just glanced at him encouragingly without saying a word.

"Some weeks ago," he went on, "I found out by accident, quite by accident, something that I am afraid you wished me not to know; I mean that you—that you are engaged, are you not, to Mr. Churchill?"

Her clear grave eyes dilated a little with surprise; a slight frown ruffled her smooth brow, but she only said "yes," in a low tone.

"I tell you now," continued Rafe, growing more and more embarrassed, "because I think it is not honourable to pretend to know nothing of what I am really aware of, but I cannot tell you how I found it out; and Aunt Harriet, I should be very much obliged to you if you would not ask me."

"Why have you been silent so long?"

"Because I did not feel as if I could tell you in a proper way; I was so much vexed, and besides it is only this last day or two that I have seen the obligation of telling so strongly."

"Why should you be vexed?"

"Because I—I"—he grew terribly confused—"I did not like the idea of having Mr. Churchill for an uncle. I was very"—silly, he was going to say, but he hesitated for a better word, and in the meantime his aunt had risen and was collecting her work.

"No matter," she said, flushing crimson; "I would rather not hear any more. You say you found this out by accident, and I trust your word, and do not blame you; only let me beg that you will say nothing of it until I give you leave."

She went away directly, and Rafe was left alone, feeling very uncomfortable indeed. He had performed a disagreeable duty, and had perhaps rendered it more disagreeable than necessary, by an injudicious choice of words. It was over, that was one comfort, but it was vexatious that he had not been able to accomplish it without giving offence to his aunt. The secret which Adele had imparted to him, had weighed on his mind ever since; but at first he had felt so sore and angry about it, that he could not have spoken of it without showing his annoyance. Now his vexation was beginning to wear off, and since that walk to Naresborough, in which Mr. Churchill's character had come out in a new light, the prospect of having him for an uncle, had not seemed at all so unbearable. Still he was too proud to wish to own to any change of sentiment, and was not sufficiently accustomed to consider other people's feelings to reflect how disagreeable it must be for his aunt to hear that her nephew regarded her engagement as a thing "to be vexed about." So he had blurted out his confession awkwardly enough, and was now rather disgusted at his own want of tact, and a little indignant at his aunt's hauteur. He did not meet her again until teatime, and then she looked and spoke just as usual, while he felt rather awkward and guilty, and wore his gloomiest and most absent air.

"You look quite ill, my dear boy," said grand-mamma, when she saw him sitting silent and pre-occupied with his tea untasted before him. "I am

afraid you are losing your appetite again. Are you feverish? Come and let me feel your pulse."

"Oh, grandmamma," said Rafe, rousing himself, "there's nothing at all the matter with me, thank you, I was only thinking."

"Meals are not the time for reveries, most poetical Rafe," said Anna, laughing. "I have always been of the opinion of Dr. Syntax, that there's 'nothing picturesque in beef,' and nothing worth poetizing about in bread and butter."

Playful speeches of this kind were Rafe's horror, a not very amiable expression shot out of his great gloomy eyes.

"You look like the picture of Othello at Churchill Abbots, Rafe," said Charlie.

"Be quiet, Charlie," said Cissy, who could not bear to see Rafe teased; "don't you know you're not to talk?"

"England's a free country," rejoined Charlie, in his absurd blustering manner.

"Very likely," said Aunt Harriet smiling, "but it has laws, and you must submit to rules like other people, Charlie; so do not let me hear you speak again during tea-time."

Charlie ate his bread and milk in dissatisfied silence, and Cissy fearing she had been unkind to him slipped into his plate a piece of cake which her grandmamma had just given to her. Miss Eden and her mother went on talking about a poor man who had met with an accident in the village, and Adele and Maud held a sort of contraband conver-

sation under their breath ; contraband inasmuch as Maud being classed with Charlie and Dora as 'the little ones,' was like them forbidden to talk at meals when grandmamma was present, a prohibition which had been found necessary to prevent their fatiguing her by their chatter.

Rafe looked round at them all, and thought how could they possibly manage if Aunt Harriet were to marry and go away. "None of them would mind Aunt Anna," he said to himself, "except perhaps Cissy and Maud, and even they would not behave so well if they had not Aunt Harriet's approval to try for." And then was Aunt Anna fit for such a charge ? He glanced at her childish pretty face, and thought not. "She's a dear little thing, but she has no authority about her," he continued to himself, "I do believe the little ones are more afraid of me than of her, and a pretty business it would be if I had to set up for Mentor. After all, Aunt Harriet's a capital creature ; I don't know what we should ever have done without her. I wish Adele wouldn't encourage Maud to talk, she knows she ought not, they'll be giggling presently." And in fact a low half suppressed laugh burst from Maud's lips just as the thought crossed his mind. Grandmamma looked uncomfortable : she was very indulgent, but she had a great dislike to both giggling and whispering. "Why don't you speak out, my dears ?" she said mildly.

Adele, affecting not to notice the question, assumed her demurest expression, and went on with

her tea. Maud looked up ingenuously with the honest answer, "Because I didn't want Aunt Harriet to hear, it was wrong of me, I know; I beg your pardon, grandmamma."

"Ah, silly children!" said grandmamma, shaking her head, "you would all be ruined if you had not Harriet to look after you: my dear,"—with a very sweet look at her—"you are only too valuable to us."

A lovely smile full of gratitude gave eloquent thanks for this little speech, and simple as were the words they were very welcome to the good daughter to whom such tokens of approval came but rarely. It had happened with Harriet Eden as it happens with many others, that a singular unselfishness—a noble devotion to duty—had met with but little appreciation in those around her. She had never been her mother's favourite;—the children's father, the firstborn of the flock, had formerly held the dearest place in Mrs. Eden's heart: since his death her especial fondness had been concentrated on her youngest daughter, the pretty playful Anna.

Mrs. Eden admired Harriet, respected her, even looked up to her; wondered at her talents so much greater than her own, wondered still more at her firm, self-reliant nature; leant upon this strong heart which ever since her husband's death she had found her best earthly support, trusted all her affairs to the guidance of this clear head, told every one how well her daughter understood her, and never once surmised that all her life long she had failed to understand her daughter.

Five years before the date of this story, the tidings had come that these children, now grouped in Mrs. Eden's dining-room, were orphans in a foreign land, and left almost totally unprovided for.

The grandmamma's kind heart opened at once to receive the little ones, "they must all come here," she decided. Anna, a child herself, eagerly welcomed the idea; upon Harriet fell the burden of carrying out the plan. Mrs. Eden was not rich, her husband, the comparatively poor descendant of a once proud and wealthy family, had been able to leave her nothing but the house in which she lived, and an income sufficient to maintain her and her daughters in comfort, but not in luxury. To enable her to receive these new inmates of her home something must be given up; Harriet at once decided that if possible it should not be anything of which her mother would feel the loss; her own pleasures she had no hesitation in sacrificing. She had really a good deal in her power to resign, for her father, whose pride and darling she had been, had delighted to bestow on her comforts and advantages whose costliness she had never considered till now that she felt obliged to give them up. And give them up she did, voluntarily, ungrudgingly, without waiting for a hint or suggestion from any one. She sold her horse and dismissed her groom; she sent away her lady's-maid, and began to occupy herself with needlework; she turned her study into a school-room and sold her harp; she put away her Greek and German, Painting and Poetry; and be-

gan to read up History and Geography, French and Latin Grammar, that she might be competent to teach her little nephews and nieces, and so save the expense of a governess. Her mother saw the daily sacrifices she made, thought them quite natural in the cause of "poor Charles's children," and would have proceeded to give up her own comforts in the same way if her daughter by persuasion, argument, and entreaty, had not prevailed on her to retain them. Harriet asked for no pity, made no complaint, and her conduct was taken as a matter of course by the rest of the family ; they would only have been surprised if she had acted otherwise. Her brother William wrote her an affectionate letter, begged her to apply to him if she wanted anything, regretted that his French wife's preference for her own country obliged him to reside too far away to be any assistance to his mother in her new charge, and hinted that he should have been glad to have adopted his eldest nephew and niece, and brought them up with his own little girl, if Therèse would have consented to the plan.

Only one person, her friend from childhood, understood the extent of the sacrifice she was making, and he to a certain degree shared in it, for these new duties of her's cut her off from him, and postponed the hopes he had formed concerning her to an indefinite future. This friend was Arthur Churchill. He opposed her plans by one of his own, a very generous if not a very feasible one, namely, that she should marry him at once, and

that they should adopt all the children, and take them to live with them at Churchill Abbots. He refused to see a single objection to this scheme, but Miss Eden saw a great many. In the first place, she said it was not fair that he should be burdened with her relations; in the second, her mother would not have liked it; in the third, it would have greatly displeased all his friends, who were already annoyed at his intention of making so bad a match as "that poor Miss Eden;" and in short she found so much to say against it, and was so determined to adhere to her own plan of remaining with her mother till Anna was old enough to take charge of the children, that King Arthur was reluctantly obliged to give it up, and make up his mind to an engagement of indefinite length. And as he was not one of those people who, when disappointed in their own plans, will not lift a finger to help forward anyone else's, he proved the greatest support that Harriet Eden had in the task she had so unselfishly undertaken.

And at first—there is no denying it—the task was a hard one; the children were most of them delicate; some of them wilful, and all of them very helpless, and accustomed to be over-indulged. Her mother, with a grandmamma's usual soft-heartedness, wanted to indulge them still more, and in opposing this, poor Harriet got a character for *hard*-heartedness which she little deserved. And she who had loved her mother truly and tenderly all her life, and soon began to love these children

very much too, was at first misunderstood by both, and held up by her younger sister as a miracle of harshness.

She did not take refuge in self-pity; she did not set up for an "unappreciated angel," her humility saved her from this. She blamed her own deficiency in warmth of manner; she deplored her own impatience of idleness and stupidity; when the children were tiresome, she thought it might be because she did not manage them properly; when her very heart died within her with weariness and disappointment, she complained of no one, and blamed no one but herself.

She turned devoutly to a wisdom beyond her own; she asked for help where no one asks in vain; she made mistakes sometimes, as who does not? she was sometimes discouraged, as who would not have been? but she triumphed at last, upheld by faith and love.

Hardly any one would have recognised in the orderly flock, trained by five years of careful culture, the wayward, ignorant, excitable children, that had been confided to her care.

Maud, then about seven years old, had seemed so much the most pleasing and promising of the set, that she had found it very difficult not to make a favourite of her. She was so much afraid of doing this, it was so repugnant to her just and upright nature, that she had gone a little into the other extreme, and had been almost more severe to her than to the others. Her mother and Anna

accused her of loving Maud the least ; the child's tears and sad reproachful glances seemed to tell the same story. Harriet saw and heard all, and was patient and silent. "I must not let her be spoiled," she said to herself. "I must try above all things to make her good, if she loves me the less for it; it cannot be helped." And time proved that this was not the case; the sweet generous nature of the child overleaped the wound to her vanity; the little petted beauty heretofore accustomed to be the favourite with everybody, gave her truest and deepest affection to the one person whose favourite she did not suppose herself to be. Maud had naturally a profound admiration of everything good and noble, and she had mind and heart enough soon to discern the nobleness and goodness of her strict young aunt, so that little as she suspected it, Harriet Eden had perhaps no more fervent admirer in the world than her sensitive little niece.

The children little guessed how much their aunt had given up for them, for she was not one to make them feel the burden of their obligation; but now that Rafe knew of her engagement to Mr. Churchill, he was able to appreciate better than ever before, the wonderful unselfishness of her devotion to himself, and his brothers and sisters. The more he thought of the way her life was passed, the more intolerable it appeared to him, for he did not yet understand how completely her perseverance in duty had brought its own reward, and with how

great a peace her mind was filled in spite of outward trials.

He began to feel a most real pity for her and for Mr. Churchill ; his imagination exalted them into a species of martyrs, and an intense wish came over him to make them happy for the future, to bring to pass their marriage by some hitherto undreamt of means, to crown them both with blessings of all kinds, and so to atone for the sorrows of the past.

Such was the vision which his busy brain was forming when disturbed by his grandmamma's anxiety about his pale face and abstracted air. Of course the scheme was not a personally agreeable one, but he had made up his mind most heroically as he thought, to sacrifice all his objections to the match at the shrine of duty and gratitude. They should be happy ; he would offer no obstacle ; and in this effort of generosity, he almost forgot that they were by no means waiting for his approval, and probably would care little whether he gave it or not.

He was still deep in reverie when the meal was finished, and the others rose from table. Maud stopped her aunt for a minute as she was leaving the room, and whispered softly, "I am sorry I was naughty, Aunt Harriet ; please forgive me," (a petition which Aunt Harriet was not slow to grant,) and in turning towards the little girl, Miss Eden observed Rafe's gloomy abstracted countenance. She immediately dismissed Maud, with a

gentle assurance of forgiveness, and going up to him said smilingly, "Pray don't look so tragic, Sir Knight of the dolorous countenance. I am sorry you are to be afflicted through my means with an uncle whom you don't like, but take courage, the calamity is not going to happen immediately, and may perhaps not be so bad as you think after all."

There was such mirth and even mischief lurking in her beautiful eyes, that Rafe saw directly she took a different view of the case from what she had done when he had first made his confession. "You have been talking to Mr. Churchill about it," he said.

"I have, and he is not exactly broken-hearted at finding you disapprove; he thinks you will be very good friends in time."

Rafe looked incredulity, but observed with a magnanimous air, "You need not be afraid, Aunt Harriet, I don't wish to stand in the way of your happiness."

This was too much, and to Rafe's astonishment and horror, Miss Eden fairly burst out laughing. "My dear Rafe," she said, as soon as she could speak, "we didn't for a moment suppose that you intended to forbid the banns; it is on your own account that we are sorry you have set yourself so against Mr. Churchill. You would be so much happier if you gave up this absurd prejudice, and made friends with him as your brother and sisters do."

Rafe was too much offended to reply, and seeing

it, she added gravely, "You must not imagine that I wish to force your feelings. I don't expect you to see all in Mr. Churchill that I do who have known him from childhood, I only want you to be candid and just, and take his kindness as it is meant. And one thing more, Rafe,—now that you know what he is to me, your own sense must tell you how painful it is to me to hear the remarks you sometimes allow yourself to make on him. I shall trust to your good feeling to abstain from them for the future."

Rafe was not offended now; he admired the spirit which kindled in her eyes and glowed in her cheeks even as she uttered this protest against any slight upon her friend. "Aunt Harriet," he observed, rather *à propos des bottes*, "if I were a knight I would take you for my ladylove."

"Thank you," she answered, smiling archly once more, "that was a very knightly speech, though not exactly to the point."

He looked at her dreamily, thought how very beautiful she was, and might have made another romantic speech, but that at that moment she exclaimed, "I have left the tea-caddy unlocked; how careless of me!" and thus brought him back as with a dash of cold water to the commonplaces of life.



CHAPTER X.

UNDER A CLOUD.

ALL this while Adele was growing day by day more fretful and discontented ; she was not exactly gloomy or sullen, she had still occasionally fits of vivacious gaiety, and could assume, whenever she thought it worth while, the graceful, caressing ways which endeared her to her cousins, spite of her many faults ; but she was captious and irritable, disobedient to her aunts, impatient with her little cousins, uneasy in conscience, and unhappy at heart. In vain Aunt Harriet tried to lead her to interest herself in reading and music ; in vain grandmamma petted her, and Anna devised schemes for her amusement ; at times she felt touched by their kindness, but still she remained dissatisfied, and, as she said, "*ennuyée*." Her father had warned her that Abbotsbrook was a quiet village, and that she must not expect excitement or gaiety of any sort : but her mother had dwelt upon the riches and grandeur of Mr. Churchill, '*ce beau jeune homme*,'

'*ce charmant garçon*,' till Adele had expected to find Churchill Abbots a paradise of luxury and elegance, and its owner a magnificent personage, passing his time in giving fêtes to the neighbourhood, like a certain 'comte' of her acquaintance. When at sight of the reality this vision fell to the ground, her one hope of amusement fell with it; and though at times some little unexpected treat, such as Mr. Lascelles' party, diverted and pleased her, she returned in the interval to her grumbling declaration, that Abbotsbrook was 'insufferably' dull. Her discontent was not lessened by the receipt of a rather severe letter from her father, written in answer to a complaining one which she had addressed to her mamma. He guessed very clearly at the real state of the case, and only spoke the truth when he said that it was chiefly Adele's own fault that she was not happy at Abbotsbrook; but though she cried over his letter, and sobbed out, "Oh! papa, oh! papa," in such piteous accents, that Cissy who overheard her was alarmed and distressed; she would not own to herself that his remarks were well founded, and her tears did not flow from penitence, but from wounded feeling, and vexation at what she thought his harshness. There seemed to be no present prospect of her return home, her father wrote that he wished her to remain at Abbotsbrook till April, (this was the beginning of February) as her grandmamma had kindly consented to keep her till then; that he intended to come and fetch her himself, and that he should hope then

to hear a better account of her than her aunts had as yet been able to give. This piece of his letter vexed Adele especially. "Yes, he will come," she said to herself, "and Aunt Harriet will tell him all my misdemeanours, and he will be so shocked and so stern; perhaps he will send me to school, as he once threatened to do; at any rate he will be very angry with me, and my life will be so triste, so triste. Oh! maman, chère petite maman, how I wish I had never left you!"

She had but just dried the tears that this reflection had caused her, and was coldly responding to Cissy's earnest endeavours to comfort her, (endeavours somewhat blindly made, since Cissy could not guess the cause of her grief) when there came a soft tap at the door, and Aunt Harriet entered, with a letter in her hand. She signed to Cissy to leave them, and sitting down by Adele who was crouched up on her bed with her face turned to the wall, said gently and gravely, "I have had a letter from your father, Adele, as I see you also have had; I am afraid he is not quite happy about you; he is somewhat disappointed in his little daughter."

"He is very unkind to me," sobbed Adele, without looking round; "nobody loves me, or feels for me but mamma."

"Hush, hush, you must not say or think that," said her aunt, much distressed; "it is from love for you that your father grieves so much at what he sees wrong in you. That is the best kind of

love, is it not ? which desires nothing so much as our advance in goodness, and which cannot afford to spoil us, because it sees that that, however pleasant to us, would not be for our real good."

"I don't know," said Adele pettishly; "I am not accustomed to be scolded."

"Adele!" exclaimed her aunt, almost in despair, "can you really see no difference between the reproof unwillingly given of a father who loves you, and *scolding*, which is a mere outbreak of ill-temper?"

"I daresay papa was angry enough when he wrote that," coolly retorted Adele: "I don't think he has at all a good temper."

A scarlet flush of shame and indignation passed up into Miss Eden's calm face at this impertinent speech.

"Adele," she said, "if you are not ashamed for yourself, I am ashamed for you. I could not have believed that any child would have spoken of her father as you have spoken of yours. I came here thinking to find you grieving for the past, and desiring to do better for the future, and I was anxious to console and help you; but since you are in such a perverse mood, I think I had better leave you alone for the present, and by and by I shall hope to find you in a better mind."

She went away when she had said this, sadly disappointed and grieved at heart, as she often was after a conversation with Adele. She was passing on towards the drawing-room to read to her mother

the more cheerful part of her brother's letter, when she saw Mr. Churchill coming up the stairs, and thrusting back her sorrowful thoughts that she might greet him with her accustomed smile, she slipped the letter, as she thought, into her pocket, feeling as if thus putting away for a time a disagreeable subject. In her haste, however, she let it slip through the pockethole of her dress, and it fell to the ground, unnoticed by her as she hastened on.

Some time after a little figure stole languidly along the passage, stopped at the place where the letter lay, paused a moment, half turned away, then suddenly turned round again, and snatching up the letter darted back by the way it had come.

Some little time after this again Maud came singing up the stairs, went into her own room which joined Adele's, and after making a few unanswered taps on the door of communication between them, opened it softly, and advancing on tiptoe towards her cousin who stood at the window reading, put both her hands on her shoulders, and startled her by a merry "peep-bo!"

Adele coloured violently with what looked like either anger or fear, and in her confusion dropped the letter which she held in her hands. Maud snatched it up, and with a little childish love of tormenting, held it behind her with both hands, saying, "Now what will you give me to give it back to you? more than one kiss, I should hope, for it must be very interesting to have engrossed you so deeply."

"Nonsense, Maud," said Adele angrily, "give it me this minute, you have no right to frighten me so, or take away my letter; I shall tell Aunt Harriet of you, and she will be very much displeased; you know she punished you last week for being rude."

"But Adele," said Maud, quite aghast at her unkindness, "I did not mean to frighten you, I was only in fun, and I knocked first, but you wouldn't answer. There, take your letter; you need not suspect me of wanting to read it, I wouldn't be so mean."

Was it fear or shame, or what, that sent that rush of blood again to Adele's cheek at her cousin's simple words? She stammered something inaudibly, and stretched out her hand for the letter which Maud gave in what she intended for a very dignified manner, which was so slow a one that involuntarily her eye caught the first line of the bold clear handwriting, containing the words, not as she expected, "My dear Adele," but "Dearest Harriet."

"Did Aunt Harriet give you her letter to read?" she asked in surprise.

"What business is that of yours?" asked Adele in tones that faltered, Maud thought, with anger. "You said I need not suspect you of wanting to read it; how came you to see that, then?"

"Oh, Adele, it was quite by accident indeed," replied the child, struggling to keep down the indignation which Adele's sneering words awoke

in her, "please don't be so vexed with me, why should you mind my knowing that Aunt Harriet has lent you her letter to read?"

Adele's only answer was a violent burst of tears, and she began to walk up and down the room almost stamping her feet with vexation. Maud looked on, puzzled and frightened, quite unable to imagine the cause of her cousin's strange behaviour.

"Is Uncle William ill," she said at last, "is there any bad news in that letter? if so, I am very sorry I interrupted you so sillily. Shall I ask Aunt Harriet to come to you? she would comfort you better than I can."

"Oh! no, no," cried Adele, catching hold of Maud as she turned towards the door, "I don't want Aunt Harriet or anybody, there is nothing the matter with me, only promise me, Maud, that you will not say a word of all this to any one."

"All what?" said Maud, "you know I should not think of complaining of you, I thought you were going to tell Aunt Harriet of me."

"No, no, that was nonsense; see, we are friends again," and she kissed her eagerly; "so now promise me, *chérie*, that you will not say anything about having found me reading this letter, promise me that, and I will promise never to be cross to you again."

"But Adele, I don't understand." No, it was plain she did not; her great honest, innocent eyes were staring blankly up in Adele's shame-dyed face.

"Oh dear," sobbed Adele, "what am I to do? oh! Maud, be kind, be generous, and I will tell you all about it; Aunt Harriet did not lend me this letter, I found it by accident; it is from my papa, and it is all about me; I wanted so very much to see what he said of me, and I thought there could not be much harm in looking at it—but oh!"—and she broke off suddenly, abashed by the indignant and almost incredulous surprise of her cousin's transparent countenance.

"You don't mean that you have read it?" Maud exclaimed,—“read Aunt Harriet's letter without her leave! oh! how could you? how *could* you?”

"I did not mean any harm," pleaded Adele; "I did not stop to think, I flew back with it here directly I had found it, and locked the door and read it; I did not think of the other door through which you came prying on me."

"Oh! I am so sorry I came, and yet no, I am not, if I can persuade you to do what is right. Dear Adele, you will give the letter back to Aunt Harriet, and tell her all about it, will you not?"

"Tell Aunt Harriet! are you mad? just think how angry she would be; how can you talk so childishly."

"But I am right, I know I am right," urged Maud earnestly; "if I had done such a thing, I would rather confess it, even if I were to be punished ever so much, than go about knowing I had done it, feeling guilty, and dreading to be found out."

"I shall burn the letter," said Adele, "and then

it never *can* be found out, for you will not surely be so mean as to tell of me."

"No, I will say nothing unless I am obliged ; but if Aunt Harriet asks me if I have seen it, what am I to say ? I cannot tell an untruth. And, besides, you have no right to burn Aunt Harriet's letter ; I will not let you ;" and to prevent all chance of it, she snatched it from her cousin's hand.

"And now you will give it to Aunt Harriet, and tell her the whole story ; ah, tell-tale !" sneered Adele, struggling to regain it.

"I will not," said Maud, "I will give it her ; but I will not say one word about you. I am going, you shall not stop me ;" and before Adele could hinder her, she had left the room, and was rushing down the passage. She burst breathless into the drawing-room and looked round for her aunt ; there she was in the window-seat, and Mr. Churchill beside her ; Maud had not counted on this, but she did not dare pause to think, she darted up to her aunt, put the letter into her hand, and exclaiming "This is yours, I found it ;" was rushing away again, when Mr. Churchill caught hold of her, and laughingly asked her if she intended to cut him.

Maud turned round with an unwilling "How do you do ?" and meantime Aunt Harriet examined the letter, and exclaimed, "Where did you find this, Maud ? I was convinced I had it in my pocket."

Maud coloured crimson, but did not utter a word,

while Mr Churchill suggested, "Perhaps you have a hole in your pocket, Harriet," a supposition which Miss Eden laughingly negatived, declaring he ought to have known her better than to have suspected her of such untidiness.

"I suppose I must have dropped it near this door, when I fancied I was putting it into my pocket," she said after a moment's thought. "Was that where you found it, Maud?"

"No," was the scarcely audible answer, and slipping her hand from Mr. Churchill's, Maud would have run out of the room, but her aunt called her back.

"Wait one minute," she said quietly; "have I not told you that it is rude to run away when anyone is talking to you? - There is no need to look so frightened; I do not for a moment suspect you of having read my letter, but now I think of it, how does it come to be out of its envelope? I am sure it was not so when I last saw it."

An utter consternation covered the little maiden's countenance; she looked from her aunt's grave inquiring face, to Mr. Churchill's expectant one, and burst into tears. Her aunt drew her towards her. "My dear little frightened goose," she said kindly, though a little impatiently, "do not begin to cry because you are asked a simple question; just tell me where you found the letter, and then we will think no more about it."

"I cannot tell you; you must not ask me," faltered the child between her sobs.

"But that is ridiculous ; I have a right to ask where my letter was found ; come, tell me like a good child."

"I can't tell you ; I can't indeed," was all the reply.

Aunt Harriet began to look grieved as well as puzzled.

"You are making quite a mystery of this simple affair, Maud," she said ; "you behave so strangely that I hardly know what to think. You have not read this letter, not a word of it, I am sure ; have you ?"

"Only one or two," said Maud, with a fresh shower of tears, and trying to hide away her face on her aunt's shoulder.

Aunt Harriet looked graver still ; a shadow of disappointment stole over Mr. Churchill's kind face.

"Then that is why you are so much ashamed, and no wonder," Miss Eden said presently.

"No ; I saw them by accident ; I did not mean to. You may not believe me, Aunt Harriet, but it is true," and Maud raised her head quite proudly as she spoke.

"I am quite ready to believe you," said her aunt gently, "but then why this distress, why do you not speak out ?"

Again Maud's head was bowed with weeping, and she did not answer a word.

"What am I to think ?" said Miss Eden, turning a distressed face towards Mr. Churchill.

"It is puzzling," he answered, "but I think if I were you, I would not pronounce 'guilty' just yet; perhaps she will be more frank when she is alone with you, so suppose I say good-bye," and he rose to go.

"No, no," pleaded Maud, who dreaded being deprived of her champion, "please don't go away, I have nothing to say to Aunt Harriet; thank you for not making up your mind that I am bad. Some day perhaps,—no, though, you will never know, you will *never* know," and she began to cry again.

For a moment there flashed through Miss Eden's mind the suspicion that Adele had something to do with all this, but she quickly repressed it. "That is just like my partiality," she thought, "trying to clear Maud at any one else's expense." And it was with a severer manner than before, that she turned towards Maud and said, "There is no use in saying anything more about it now; I am sorry to see you so wanting in self-command; go to your room, I will come to you there presently, and I hope you will then be able to speak more clearly."

Maud felt in despair; was this scene to come over again? How could she ever keep silent, and know that Aunt Harriet suspected her? And yet, her promise to Adele, *that must* be kept.

"Aunt Harriet," she said, turning round and facing her, speaking for the first time slowly and distinctly, "it is of no use to ask me more about all this, for I never will tell you; I know you

must think me very obstinate and naughty, but I can't help it, I can't indeed."

Poor little Maud,—her heart sunk as she spoke; she remembered how she had read in story books of children, who were suspected of having done something very wrong, and how harshly they were treated while they remained under this suspicion. She almost expected to hear some dreadful sentence on herself pass Aunt Harriet's lips, but none came.

"You may go, Maud," Miss Eden said gravely; "that there is something wrong in all this, I am quite sure, but I do not wish to punish you without further proof. We will let all go on just as usual, and perhaps in time this mystery may be cleared up."

But now Maud lingered; she looked up in her aunt's face timidly, wistfully, with a strange longing look, at last she said, "Will you kiss me as you used to do before, Aunt Harriet?"

"Certainly," said Miss Eden, with an involuntary smile, "did I not tell you that all should be just as usual?"

"Will you give me one kiss now, that I may feel sure?" pleaded Maud again.

Miss Eden hesitated, but Mr. Churchill whispered, "Poor little thing, don't be too hard upon her, Harriet," and bending down, she pressed a soft calm kiss on the child's quivering lips, and sent her away.

She would have been shocked if she could have

seen the perfect passion of weeping that shook the little girl's slender frame when safe within the refuge of her own room. Adele who had been watching for her return in terrible anxiety, was stricken to the heart by the poor child's distress.

"I have not said a word about you, Adele; you need not be afraid," Maud murmured as soon as she was able to speak; "Aunt Harriet does not suspect any one but me; but oh dear! what shall I do? How shall I bear it?"

"Was she so angry then?" said Adele.

"Oh! no, she did not speak crossly at all; and when I came away she kissed me; but I am sure she thinks me so very naughty because I will not explain to her where I found the letter. I don't know what I should have done only that Mr. Churchill was so kind; he looked as if he was determined not to think badly of me; it was very, *very* good of him."

"Poor Maud, dear Maud," said Adele, stroking her hair; "*que vous êtes bonne!* How I love you for not betraying me, though if you would have only let me burn the letter there would have been no occasion."

Her speech was brought to a sudden termination by Maud's hand lightly laid on her lips. "Dear Adele," she remonstrated, "don't say that; I would rather be as miserable as possible, than that you should do anything so wrong. I daresay I haven't managed well, but I meant to do right—I meant it with all my heart. Oh! Aunt Harriet, Aunt Har-

riety, if I could only tell you all!" and her tears burst forth afresh.

"You won't betray me?" said Adele alarmed.

"No, *never*, you need not be afraid; but if you won't think me unkind, I would rather you left me alone for a little while; I want to be quiet just for a few minutes, I shall be better after that."

Adele kissed her and went sadly away, far more miserable in reality than Maud, who now that she was left alone scolded herself into composure, and then kneeling down prayed to be made good and patient, asking forgiveness for her distress as for a fault, owning herself 'naughty and silly,' and even more earnestly imploring pardon for Adele, and begging that she might be "made sorry."

It was a simple, childish prayer, but thoroughly sincere, and Maud's heart felt many degrees lighter when she rose from her knees. She did not feel in the least like a heroine, she could scarcely tell whether her conduct about the letter had been right or wrong; she only knew that she had *meant* to do right, and that the one great longing of her heart was to be good, to be one whom the great Allseeing Eye might look down on with approval.

It was rather a melancholy party that gathered round the tea-table that evening. Miss Eden looked thoughtful and sad, Adele restless and unhappy; Maud was very pale, with large dark lines round her beautiful eyes, and she scarcely dared to look up from her plate, lest at sight of Aunt Harriet's face her tears should again overflow. Grandmamma

glanced at her from time to time with great anxiety and compassion, but supposing that she had got into disgrace with her aunt, asked no questions; Anna treated her sister to some indignant looks, assuming Maud's distress as quite her fault, and Rafe and Cissy looked sad from sympathy, and wondered what was the matter. In the midst of tea a note was brought to Miss Eden from Lady Clara Lascelles; the contents of which would at another time have occasioned an outburst of delight. It was an invitation for Harriet, Anna, and their nieces and nephews to a large party to be given in honour of Mr. Churchill's birthday, which was the 19th of February. "You know," wrote Lady Clara, "that Arthur has been accustomed for years to spend his birthday with us, and this year we are anxious to mark the day by a little festivity. I proposed a ball, but Arthur declared against it, affirming that he can dance nothing but the Highland fling! so I now purpose having a sort of juvenile gathering, with fireworks on the lawn, an exhibition of fantoccini, conjuring, and a little dancing, as the amusements. To this he has consented very amiably, chiefly, I think, because he imagines it will be a nice treat for your little people, all of whom I shall reckon on seeing."

"Me too!" exclaimed little Dora, when she heard that all were invited, and Charlie was loud in his desire to see the "fanto-what-d'ye-call'ems," but Adele was too conscience-stricken and miserable for even the thoughts of so grand a party to

give her more than a passing pleasure, and Maud would have given all the parties that ever were heard of, for one kindly look from her aunt's grave eyes. Anna caught Maud's hand as she was leaving the room, after tea was over, and asked tenderly "What is the matter with my darling? Has Aunt Harriet been angry with her?" but Maud only answered, "No, oh! no; she is very good and kind," and disengaging her hand hurried away. Some time after Anna obtained from her sister an explanation of Maud's woful looks, but though she protested her belief in Maud's innocence, she could advance no proof, and agreed that the affair was a strange one. Miss Eden accepted Lady Clara's invitation for Anna and the children, though declining it for herself, and Adele tried to divert the uneasiness of her mind by considerations of what dress she should wear, and who the other guests were likely to be. But it was but a poor resource, for conscience would be heard, and Maud's gentle, patient grief was a daily reproach to her. Aunt Harriet said and meant that all should be as before, but involuntarily a certain coldness stole into her manner to Maud. She thought it was a fault unconfessed that lay so heavy at the child's heart, and steeled herself against the tender, pitiful looks that seemed to plead for the sympathy which she judged it right to withhold.



CHAPTER XI.

LADY CLARA'S PARTY.

LIGHTS were flashing in every window of the stately mansion of Woodmere, and the gay strains of a lively waltz were heard issuing from the drawing-room, while carriages dashed incessantly up the avenue, when Aunt Anna and her nieces and nephews arrived there on the evening of the 19th.

As they passed through the hall on their way to the cloak room, a stately, proud-looking gentleman, in the prime of life, a fair delicate lady somewhat younger, and two handsome, fashionably-dressed little girls, were approaching the door of the drawing-room, and it scarcely needed the footman's announcement, "Sir Eustace and Lady Churchill and the Miss Churchills," to assure the little Edens that these were some relations of their dear "King Arthur," so strong was the family likeness. But they were "like with a difference," for in their cold statuesque faces, there was no trace of the mirthful spirit that lurked in his, nor could they

boast the lovely smile which he had inherited from his mother. Charlie affirmed in a whisper that they looked "stupid and stuck-up," and Anna shrank back rather nervously, wishing she could prolong indefinitely the quiet sipping of tea in the refreshment-room, instead of having to make her entry into the crowded drawing-room, with her frightened flock clinging round her.

She was screwing up her courage for the undertaking, and laughing at Rafe's remark, that he "wished they were all in bed, instead of turning night into day at an odious party," when gentlemen's steps were heard approaching, and the little girls clustered up close to their aunt, all but Adele, who with perfect self-possession was employed in arranging the flounces of her pink silk dress. There was no cause for alarm, for it was Mr. Churchill's well-known voice, that soon struck on their ears, with a satisfied "All right, here they are," while his companion proved to be only Harcourt Lascelles, who at sight of them, threw himself into a stage attitude, and extending his arms, exclaimed in imitation of Lord Cranstoun's goblin page, "Found! found! found!"

"I am very glad we are found," said Anna, laughing; "I was just making up my mind to go into the drawing-room, but my courage seemed oozing out of the palms of my hands."

"Perhaps with a secret prescience, that if you lingered a little longer, I should be here to offer you my arm," said Harcourt, suiting the action to

the word, but Mr. Churchill stopped Anna for a minute and whispered, "Is anything the matter with Rafe? he looks quite ill."

"I think he has a headache, but he won't own to any malady; pray don't say anything about it, it will make him so cross," and she passed on, leaving Mr. Churchill to follow with the children, greatly to Harcourt's delight, who as he conducted her to his mother turned round, and touching the arm of a young man that stood by, exclaimed in a mischievously audible tone, "Enter paterfamilias, and the nineteen small," a speech which Mr. Churchill only noticed by a good-humoured laugh, and "You always were an impertinent fellow, Harcourt," but which incensed Rafe and Adele in the highest degree.

To the children's surprise the dancing had already begun; the conjuror it seemed had not yet arrived, and Lady Clara to avoid the awkward pause of anticipation, had got up some dances among the little folks.

"Victoria is here, would you like to speak to her?" said Mr. Churchill to Cissy, as soon as they had time to look round them.

"Is she? I don't see her," she replied, and in fact she failed to recognize the magnificent young lady in scarlet crape, who was standing laughing and talking in the centre of a group of gentlemen, as her playmate of a few weeks before.

"What a giddy little being it is," said Mr. Churchill, as he pointed her out, "I shall go and fetch her."

Cissy glanced down at her own dress in its simple whiteness, and said timidly, "Please don't interrupt her, perhaps she will not care to speak to me," but Mr. Churchill soon settled that point by advancing to the group, and after a moment's parley, bringing back Victoria with him. She greeted Cissy and Maud quite affectionately, and spoke politely to the others, and though Charlie whispered to Dora that she "looked like a great scarlet flamingo, and he was sure Aunt Harriet would not like such a smart frock," he was at once surprised and flattered, when she turned to him and said, "There is going to be a quadrille in a minute or two, will you dance it with me, Charlie?"

He assented, though a little awkwardly, and blushing very much, while Aunt Anna came forward and told Victoria that she was afraid she would find her little partner somewhat clumsy, as he "could not be accused of sacrificing much to the graces."

"Oh, I don't mind about that," said Victoria, laughing, "I shall regard Charlie's dancing with me as a personal favour, since it will save me from my cousin Alured, whose elegance quite oppresses me. By the by though, I know whom he will just suit," and seizing Charlie's hand, she made him escort her across the room, where, leaning in a graceful attitude against the wall, was a rather conceited-looking youth of about seventeen, the cousin Alured of whom she had spoken. She brought him back with her, and introduced him

with an affectation of great solemnity to Adele, whom he requested to be his partner in the approaching quadrille.

The sets were fast making up ; Rafe in spite of an assertion that he did not wish to dance, was borne off by Lady Clara, and introduced to a timid little girl with flaxen hair, whose name "Miss Gwendoline de Courcy," was the only formidable thing about her, and Mr. Churchill brought up two fine-looking boys, both Churchills, as partners for Cissy and Dora. He was just going to resume a conversation on politics with his cousin Sir Eustace, when his eye fell on Maud, who was standing alone and unnoticed, her large eyes bent on the ground, and a sort of enforced patience and good humour in her expressive face.

"Maud all alone!" he said, turning to her, "where is your aunt?"

"Gone to dance with Mr. Harcourt," she replied, and as he looked surprised, she added, "there are a good many grown up people going to dance."

"And I suppose I must find a partner for you," he said, glancing round the room, but failing to discover one that seemed suitable.

"Oh, thank you, it doesn't matter," said Maud, timidly, "please don't mind about me."

"But I must, you look so doleful, as if you would like so much to dance."

"I should like it," she said honestly, "because I shall be gone when they dance again by and by."

"Gone! what do you mean?"

"Why the fly is coming for Charlie and Dora and me as soon as the fireworks are over; Aunt Harriet said it was to be so."

"Oh! never mind, you can tell her I asked you to stay."

"But she wouldn't like it," objected Maud.

"She will if I like it," he answered with an arch smiling look.

"Yes, but—I think—perhaps—she would not like me to have any special indulgence just now; you know she is still displeased with me," and a torrent of crimson colour rushed up into Maud's fair cheek.

To say the truth Mr. Churchill had forgotten all about the affair of the letter, but her words recalled it to his memory, and he said kindly, "Yes, I understand, and you are anxious to please her in everything, and win back her good opinion, that is a good little girl. But come, I see the dance is beginning, and there is no time for me to go partner hunting; will you dance with me?" She scarcely liked to say yes, but he did not wait for it; before she could object she found herself among the dancers, and late as they were, they were fortunate enough to find a *vis à vis*.

Sir Eustace looked somewhat astonished and horrified at his cousin's sudden defection, and opined that it "must be a great bore to dance with that little girl;" but King Arthur, though by no means a dancing man, seemed perfectly unembarrassed,

treated his little partner with good-natured courtesy, and if he thought it 'a bore,' did not show it by his face.

Maud tripped gracefully through the dance, unconsciously attracting a good deal of attention from her extreme beauty, so completely unmarred by affectation of any kind. At the close of the quadrille a handsome, indolent looking man who had been leaning against the wall watching her, came forward, and requested from Mr. Churchill an introduction to his 'fairy-like partner,' which being effected, he proceeded to beg for the pleasure of dancing the Lancers with her; a request which to his great amusement she referred to Mr. Churchill by an innocently appealing glance, and a timid "May I?"

"Do you always ask your last partner whether you may dance with your next?" he inquired as they stood waiting till the set was made up.

"No indeed," said Maud alarmed at his satirical tone; "but I am not used to dance with grown up gentlemen, and I was not sure whether my aunt would like me to."

"But Mr. Churchill is not your aunt, and he is a 'grown up gentleman.'"

"Yes I know, but he is different, because he is our great friend, and when he gives me leave to do things Aunt Harriet does not mind."

"Oh, indeed, that must be remarkably convenient," was the reply, spoken with imperturbable gravity; "I should not have thought of Churchill's

being chosen as a 'guide to the young.' I knew him at College in his frolicsome days."

"But he was always very good," exclaimed Maud eagerly, regarding his speech as an aspersion on her friend.

"Oh yes, one of the most endurably good people I ever met, but full of fun and spirits, and not exactly calculated for a mentor. You seem very alert in his defence; I suppose he makes a great pet of you."

"No," was the blunt answer.

It was soon Maud's turn to go forward in the dance, and between her turns she amused herself with trying to discover the whereabouts of all the people she knew in the room. Cissy had introduced her late partner to Adele, and was sitting down beside Rafe who looked paler than before, Charlie and Dora were dancing together, Victoria had fallen a victim to 'cousin Alured,' and Aunt Anna was still with Mr. Harcourt, who looked more wild with high spirits than ever, and violated all the proprieties of the dance by his wonderful mode of performance. Mr. Churchill had joined Sir Eustace again, and was apparently deliberating on the affairs of the nation, so grave and thoughtful did he look. Maud's gaze rested longer on him than on any of the others, and she was beginning to wonder what he was so interested in, and to wish she had him for her partner instead of the satirical Mr. Walsingham, whose cool manner disconcerted her, when she was aroused by a remark

from that gentleman, "I should think Churchill must be greatly flattered at the homage he receives from you." Maud blushed and drooped her long lashes over the eyes in question, with a very embarrassed air. "If Mr. Churchill saw me he would think I was rude to stare at him so," she said presently.

"Impossible!" said Mr. Walsingham. "How is it that you don't seem to trust to his good opinion of you?"

"I don't think he has a good opinion of me," said Maud frankly, "and if you please I wish you wouldn't —"

"Wouldn't what?"

"Say things like that, it seems as if you were laughing at me; let us talk about something sensible."

Mr. Walsingham laughed involuntarily at the notion, but ended by apologizing for his behaviour, affirming that he was not much used to little girls, and did not know that they liked sensible conversation: after which he talked so pleasantly and sensibly that Maud became quite at ease with him, and was sorry when the dance and the promenade that followed came to an end. The musicians struck up a lively polka, and Mr. Walsingham good-naturedly offered to dance it with Maud, if she felt inclined. She was on the point of a grateful "Yes, thank you, I should like it very much," when Mr. Churchill joined them, and asked her if she was not tired, offering to find her a seat.

"No thank you," she replied, "I am going to dance again with Mr. Walsingham."

King Arthur smiled, and quietly asked "What is the dance?"

"A polka," Maud answered, beginning to feel alarmed.

"A romp," said Mr. Churchill shortly, adding in a more gentle tone, "I beg your pardon, Walsingham, I don't mean any disparagement to your dancing, which no doubt is unexceptionable, but I thought you shared my antipathy to the polka. Don't you agree with me that your little partner had better sit down for awhile?"

"If her mentor desires it I suppose it must be done," was the jesting answer, and relinquishing the little hand he held, Mr. Walsingham bowed to Maud with indolent grace, and sauntered slowly away.

The little girl was rather indignant at being given up so lightly. "I thought Mr. Walsingham wanted to dance," she observed, in a mortified tone.

"I don't think he is fond of dancing, but I dare say he would have liked to please you," said Mr. Churchill, good-naturedly, "and I am a great wretch, am I not, for defeating his kind intentions? but you must believe that I did not mean it unkindly; come with me, and I will find you a seat by my cousin Alice."

"Lady Churchill!" said Maud in dismay, but Mr. Churchill only laughed, and led the way to his

cousin, who installed the frightened child in a comfortable seat at her side, and looked at her with such soft kind eyes that all her fears vanished suddenly away.

It was impossible to be constrained or shy with one so gentle as Lady Churchill, and Maud would have been very happy with her if she could have got over her longing to be among the dancers. Adele, Victoria, Charlie, and Dora, were all dancing, and though she felt glad they were enjoying themselves, it made her still more annoyed at having to sit down herself.

It was mortifying too, when Lady Clara came up all good-natured anxiety to provide her with a partner, and she was obliged to refuse the offer, she felt rather glad that Mr. Churchill was near enough to hear her mournful "Thank you, Mr. Churchill does not wish me to dance the polka," and Lady Clara's astonished "That is being very particular!" accompanied by the remark to Lady Churchill, "the polka is rather *mauvais ton* certainly, but I cannot think that matters for children."

When Mr. Churchill presently asked her if she would like to dance the quadrille which was to come next, she felt very much inclined to say, "she did not care, she hoped he would not trouble himself about her," but a little wholesome awe of him restrained this ungrateful speech, and a moment's thought recalled her to a better mind. She answered gently, "If you please, if you think I may,"

but Lady Clara turned round on him, "My dear Arthur, you are a perfect barbarian, forbidding this poor patient child to enjoy herself."

The barbarian smiled with infinite sweetness. "I own to a rooted antipathy to the polka," he said, apologetically, and added aside to Lady Clara, "but that was not all the reason of my seeming barbarity. My friend Walsingham is good-natured, but not the most judicious of men; I would rather have seen Maud dancing with some unpolished schoolboy."

Mr. Churchill went in good earnest to find a partner for her, and at this moment Anna and Cissy joined her, and asked how she had been amused. Poor good Cissy! she had declined an invitation for the polka simply in deference to an opinion which she had once heard her Aunt Harriet express against it, and though she had watched the dancers with a little innocent longing which she could not quite overcome, she had listened patiently to a long discourse from Rafe on the supreme folly of dancing, which he stigmatized as "a senseless unintellectual amusement." Senseless and unintellectual it might be, but Cissy could not help feeling pleased notwithstanding, when she found herself in a quadrille, with Maud and a pleasant gentlemanly boy as her *vis à vis*, and Victoria and Adele not far off. Nor were the little people entirely delighted when the announcement was made that the conjuror had arrived, and that all was ready for his performance; they were sorry to leave the

dancing-room, especially those who did not expect to return to it, among whom was Charlie, whose frank voice was heard loudly lamenting that they could not have "another jolly dance," affirming that "he was engaged for a waltz to the nicest girl in the room." However, there was no help for it, so all the company flocked down to the great dining-room, where admirable arrangements had been made for the accommodation of the spectators; and soon in the delight of witnessing the conjuror's magical tricks all other pleasures were forgotten.

Mr. Churchill installed his cousin Alice in a little recess in which a luxurious sofa offered a tempting resting place for her delicate frame. She looked already pale and weary, and avowed that but for the pleasure of seeing her little girls enjoy themselves, she would rather have been in bed, "except," she added cordially, "that I like to talk to you, Arthur." He was not slow to respond, for he was sincerely attached to this kind gentle creature, and grateful to her for being the only one of his relations except Lady Clara and Harcourt, who thoroughly approved of his engagement to Harriet Eden. So though he watched the conjuror's proceedings with a naïve unaffected amusement which some boys would have disdained to show, but of which his six and twenty years did not make him ashamed, he found time for a little *sotto voce* conversation, in which it must be confessed the name 'Harriet' occurred very often indeed. "What a charge she must have in all those children!" ex-

claimed Lady Churchill, “they seem good interesting little creatures though, especially that beautiful Maud; but how dreadfully ill that poor boy looks,” she added, directing his attention to Rafe who leaning back in his chair, scarcely directed one look towards the conjuror, and whose brow was contracted as if with suppressed pain.

“He does indeed,” was the reply, “I am sure he is not fit to be here, and I should like to beg him to come away; but I am afraid it would be no use, for he resents all interference.”

“Indeed!” then in a whisper, “he is not a favourite of yours, is he?”

“Alice, you are too bad,” was the smiling answer; “you should not ask such inconvenient questions, but I suppose you may be trusted. I think Rafe a clever interesting boy, with a great deal of originality, and who might be all that one would most admire, but bad health and a little too much humouring have made him selfish, and he absolutely does not know the meaning of the word ‘respect.’ Perhaps this sounds harsh, but I am afraid it is true, and I know I can safely express to you my little bits of uncharitableness.”

Lady Churchill shook her head at him. “You are severe, Arthur,” she said smiling; “but I know ‘your bark is worse than your bite.’ I have heard of your kindness to this very boy.”

“That is on the ‘love me love my dog’ principle,” he answered naïvely; “I never forget he is Harriet’s nephew.”

"I suppose he will be *your* nephew soon?"

"Hardly soon, I am afraid, and indeed he is one of the hindrances to our marriage: he is too delicate to be sent to school; and Harriet does not like to leave him on her mother's hands."

"Why does she not turn him over to yours?"

"Precisely what I say; but she is as proud as any Churchill, and declares she will not burden me with her relations. I have told her over and over again that I should not feel it a burden; but I might as well talk to the winds."

"I like her independence," said Lady Churchill warmly; "I must tell Sir Eustace of it. I only wish all your relations approved of your choice as cordially as I do, Arthur."

He gave her a gay mischievous glance, and slightly shrugged his shoulders. "Since I have your approval, Alice, I am content," he said.

She was going to reply, but he started up; "I must see after that boy, he will faint in a minute;" and leaving her side he commenced threading his way among the crowded benches, to where Rafe was sitting pale as death, and looking hardly conscious of anything that was passing around him.

"I am afraid you are ill, Rafe," he said kindly, as soon as he had reached him.

Rafe gasped out a faint 'yes,' but added immediately, "please don't say anything about it, I hope this horrid conjuring will soon be over, and then I can go."

"You had much better come now, we can go

through this side door almost unobserved, and I will take you to my aunt's little boudoir where you can lie down in quiet."

"No, no, it will make such a fuss if I go out of the room."

"It will make a much greater fuss if you faint, and have to be carried out; come at once like a sensible fellow."

Rafe groaned, but did not move. "Come," reiterated Mr. Churchill authoritatively.

"I don't want to," said Rafe, irritable with pain, "I shall do very well here; please go back to your seat, or we shall have Aunt Anna coming to ask what is the matter."

Mr. Churchill made no reply, but instead of going back he folded his arms and leant against the wall, near which Rafe was seated.

The conjuror went on with his wonderful processes of making plum pudding out of beans, and new hats out of old ones, and well sustained his character of wizard of the north, but meanwhile Rafe's countenance was growing more and more deathly, and Aunt Anna kept glancing anxiously his way, and looking appealingly at Mr. Churchill, as if to beg him to interfere. So urged he made another attempt. "Rafe," he said in low earnest tones, "I must insist on your coming away, you are evidently suffering dreadfully, and this endurance is only doing you harm; if you will not come, I shall go and tell Lady Clara that you are ill, whereupon a scene will ensue you may be sure."

Rafe tried to rise, but sank back again almost insensible ; people began to stare and ask what was the matter. Mr. Churchill ran up to the conjuror and begged from him a glass of the wine which he had produced from one of his mysterious bottles, forced Rafe to drink it, and finding him momentarily revived by it got him safely out of the room.

When the door had closed on them, Rafe nearly sank down on the floor, and Mr. Churchill stooping over him lifted him in his arms as if he had been a baby, and carried him up stairs to the room he had spoken of. He had laid him on a sofa, and was bathing his temples with eau de Cologne, when Lady Churchill and Anna joined him. They were both much concerned, and Anna full of self-reproach at not having taken better care of her nephew.

"I know he has not been so well these last few days," she explained, "but I never thought of his being so much worse this evening, and he made no complaint."

"Poor boy," said Mr. Churchill compassionately, "I am afraid he has been suffering more than we can guess. Take this eau de Cologne, Anna, and I will ring the bell for some other restoratives ; perhaps, too, there may be some smelling salts over on that table."

He went to look, and Lady Churchill assisted him in the search, taking the opportunity to whisper softly, "You see I was right, you are much kinder than you would have me believe," to which he laughingly responded, "I am not *quite* a brute."

Rafe returned to consciousness ere long, and when he raised his eyes and saw Mr. Churchill bending over him, a scarlet flush dyed his pallid cheeks, and he said faintly, "I beg your pardon for giving you so much trouble."

"Don't think of that," was the good-humoured answer, "I am glad you are better, but you must not try to talk just yet." However, in a few minutes, Rafe was well enough to sit up, and announced his intention of going home in the fly when it came for the younger ones. He tried to persuade his kind attendants to leave him and go down, assuring them that he should do very well by himself; but of course this was not to be thought of, though when Lady Clara came up after a while, full of anxiety about Rafe, Mr. Churchill was persuaded to go down with her when she returned to her guests. He came up again ere very long, and reported that the conjuring and exhibition of fantoccini were over, and that the fireworks were just beginning. Rafe showed a little animation at mention of the latter, and Mr. Churchill remembering that the windows of the little boudoir looked out upon the lawn, had the curtains undrawn, and Rafe's sofa wheeled into such a position, that he could lie at his ease, and watch the succession of fiery rockets, golden rain, Roman candles, &c., which elicited such shouts of admiration from the crowd of gazers on the lawn below.

Anna stood near her nephew, her pretty fair head pressed against the window pane, and her

sweet voice bursting forth in little joyous cries when any of the fireworks went higher, or came glistening down in brighter showers than usual.

"They are like fairy land," she exclaimed at last, "if only we were all fairies dancing about in dresses of that lovely white light, with wings of that changeful metallic red, and the green light for a scarf. My dearest Rafe, would you not like it? there would be no aching spines then."

Of course her auditors laughed, and Lady Churchill whispered to Arthur, "What a pretty creature, but more of a child than her nephew; and *à propos* of him, I want to tell you something, if you will come a little further away."

He drew back from the window, and she began to tell him of a German doctor, lately come to England, whom she had heard of as being most successful in his treatment of such cases as Rafe's.

"I believe he is coming to Brighton for a short time," she continued, "perhaps Miss Eden might manage to take her nephew there to see him; if you think it worth while, I will find out more particulars."

He thanked her, and begged her to do so, and at this moment, the fly was announced.

Old nurse had come in it to escort the little ones, and to her tender care Rafe was consigned; he was anxious to get home, and would not stay to see the end of the fireworks, which indeed he could hardly enjoy while in so much pain.

There was only room for two of the other chil-

dren, so it seemed as if Maud might now stay with a good conscience, and go home later with her aunt, but the little girl herself thought differently.

"Charlie wants so much to stay to see the end of the fireworks," she said pleadingly, "and I think Rafe would rather not have him in the fly, because he is so merry and noisy, so please let him stay, and I will go."

"It would be better," said Aunt Anna, doubtfully, "but I should like you to stay, my child; what do you think, Arthur?"

"I think Maud is a kind little maiden, and that we had better let her have her own way; I am sure Rafe will prefer having her; only get it decided quickly; we must not keep Rafe waiting."

Maud ran swiftly to put on her cloak, and hurry Dora, who was loath to leave the pleasant party, though already very tired. Lady Clara pitied Maud for having to go, and Harcourt declared he would "make Charlie's life a burden to him" for having allowed her to sacrifice her pleasure for his. She thought them very good-natured, but could only wait to give breathless thanks, and then hurried into the hall, where she found Mr. Churchill waiting to help her into the fly. She detained him for one minute to whisper, "I am sorry I was cross when you would not let me dance the polka," and he answered as softly, "I thought it was I who played 'cross patch' on the occasion, but you are right to be candid. I shall tell Aunt Harriet her little girl is a good little girl after all."

Maud's cheeks glowed under the playful praise, but the tall footman was holding open the door with an awful air, so she tripped down the steps without speaking. The words rang in her ears all the way home, and cheered her up for the effort of controlling Dora's liveliness, listening to old nurse's lamentations over Rafe, and soothing the poor boy's own unhappiness at having "made a scene."



CHAPTER XII.

RAFE.

THE illness which began at Lady Clara's party was destined to be rather a severe one, and a fortnight passed without Rafe being able to rise from his bed. Aunt Harriet nursed him assiduously, and found more difficulty in soothing his vexed mind, than in ministering to, and assuaging, his physical suffering. To his sensitive mind it was agony to have occasioned a disturbance by his ailments, and the remembrance of the many eyes that had turned on him, when faint and trembling he rose to leave the room, seemed to make him shudder all over whenever he thought of it. He declared that nothing should ever persuade him to go to a party again, and that sooner than be made a laughing stock by other boys, he would stay at home altogether, and not go out even for a walk.

All the energy and cheerfulness that he had latterly begun to feel were quite flown, he was again languid, dreary, dispirited, full of doubts about

the future, and of discontent at the present and past. Aunt Harriet was very patient and forbearing, full of kind anxiety to amuse and cheer him, and ever ready with comfort and counsel. She spent all her spare time in reading and talking to him, borrowed some beautiful engravings for him to look at, provided him with everything which could in any way alleviate his sufferings, and in fact, as Mr. Churchill observed (with a good-natured smile, which took away all harshness from the words) 'spoiled him thoroughly.' She owned to this herself, but maintained that 'a little spoiling now and then did some people good,' a doctrine which coming from Aunt Harriet's lips, astonished the children so much, that they all looked at one another in bewildered surprise, and Charlie exclaimed, "Why, Aunt Harriet, I never should have thought of *your* saying that, I only wish you'd spoil *me* a little:" a wish which came from the very depths of his heart, as he was at that moment learning, or supposed to be learning, a spelling lesson of considerable length, inflicted on him for having proved refractory under Aunt Anna's tuition. Now that Miss Eden was so much taken up with Rafe, her younger sister sometimes undertook to superintend the lessons, and things did not always go smoothly under her management.

The children could not guess what it was that made Aunt Harriet look so *very* sad, when on a visit of inspection to the schoolroom, she found, as she often did, Adele lolling idly about, Cissy in

tears over a difficult sum, Maud sitting dreaming with her copy-book before her, and Charlie performing indescribable antics in all parts of the room ; but if they could have read her inward thought, " It's no use, I must be patient for a long time yet, and so must Arthur, the children are not steady enough to be left with Anna, nor is she, poor child, fit to take charge of them ;" they would have mourned over their indolence and thoughtlessness.

But her brow was cleared again before she entered the sick boy's presence, and it was always with her own beautiful smile that she bent down to arrange his pillows more comfortably, or to bathe with fresh eau de Cologne his hot and aching forehead.

Rafe never loved her so much as when he was ill ; it was quite a treat to him then to have her near him, to see her gliding about the room with her soft noiseless footsteps, to watch her sitting at work with the sunshine streaming on her glossy hair, or to listen to the clear accents of her voice, as she read aloud to him the psalms of the day and some history or amusing story, such as she thought best fitted to interest him. She had been reading to him a translation of Joinville's memoir of St. Louis, with which he was greatly delighted ; and one day, when she had been some time absent from his room, she found him on her return, sitting up in bed, scribbling away at a furious pace on the back of an old letter, his face all one crimson flush, and

his eyes gleaming with the vividness of his thought. He turned away shamefaced at the smile and look she gave him, and half slipped the paper under his pillow, but when she said playfully, "I think I must scold, I did not bargain for nursing a poet, and shall have to prescribe a composing draught if I see any more fine frenzies," he answered with a sort of shy frankness, "I know you must think me very silly, Aunt Harriet, but I have been laying the ghost of some ideas about S. Louis. I could not be easy till I had written them, but now I can tear them up." He made a movement as if to do so, but she stretched out her hand and said gently, "you will let me read them first, why should you make such a stranger of me as to hide away from me everything you write?" and with a sudden impulse of confidence he gave the paper to her, though the next minute he hid his face in the bed-clothes, full of sensitive shame at his production, and fearful of her criticisms.

The lines were entitled 'Death of S. Louis,' and ran thus:—

" Death presses close with darksome wing,
And Life is ebbing fast away,
While last words of the dying king
Are whispered to the dying day.

" ' I go into Thy Temple, Lord,'
He murmurs with his failing breath,
He sees the flood of glory poured
To brighten all the way of death.

- “ He turns him with a smiling brow
 To bless the people loved so well,
 And with a sigh of anguish now
 He looks to where his brave ones fell.
- “ He does not see the swelling sail
 That onward streams with rescue near,
 And in the murmur of the gale
 No tones of promise meet his ear.
- “ He lies upon his ashstrewn bed
 With folded arms and tranquil eye,
 He's ta'en the helmet from his head,
 He's laid his dreams of glory by.
- “ He thought to win the empty tomb
 Where once reposed the LORD of Life,
 But beck'ning upwards through the gloom
 That LORD recalled him from the strife.
- “ And through the grave and gate of death
 He passes to his living King,
 While still upon his failing breath
 The praises of his Master ring.
- “ ‘I'll worship in Thy Heavenly Court,’
 So be it, noble heart and true :
 Whilst thou giv'st utterance to the thought,
 The Heavenly Temple meets thy view.
- “ Weep, gallant liegemen, royal son,
 Shame not to see the tears run down,
 Weep, weep, though ere thy weeping's done
 Is Charles of Anjou's trumpet blown.
- “ That clarion tells that friends draw near,
 And brings faint hearts relief from dread ;
 But not its accents silver clear
 Have virtue to arouse the dead.

“ The saint, the king, the hero sleeps,
 God’s trump alone can rouse him now ;
 His soldiers mourn, and Philip weeps,
 But peace is on the monarch’s brow.”

Miss Eden demurred a little at the expression ‘ Dying day,’ and reminded Rafe that Joinville says Louis “ rendit l’âme à son Créateur à telle même heure que notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ rendit l’esprit en l’arbre de la croix,” that is to say at three o’clock ; but as she read on, something in the simple verses touched and pleased her, and stooping down she smoothed away the dark wavy locks from Rafe’s high forehead, and gave him one of her rare kisses, whispering softly, “ I shall be proud of my nephew some day. May the spirit of S. Louis be yours, dear Rafe.”

To her surprise his lips quivered, and tears rushed to his eyes. “ I shall never be good for anything,” he said in a voice that he steadied with difficulty, “ I shall always be a poor useless wretch as I am now. Oh you don’t know how it makes me feel, Aunt Harriet, when I see young men strong and bright like Mr. Churchill, able to do anything and everything, and then know as I do that I shall never be like them, but a poor sickly creature all my days.”

His voice failed utterly, and his aunt with a look brimming over with pity and love took up a book that was lying near him and pointed to some verses underlined in it, saying, “ It was to help you when such feelings as this come on, that you marked these lines, was it not ?”

He followed the direction of her finger, and read,

“ Alone as I went up and down
 In an abbey fair to see,
 Thinking what consolation
 Was best unto adversity ;
 By chance I cast aside mine ee,
 And saw this written on a wall ;
 ‘ Of what estate, man, that thou be,
 Obey and thank thy God of all.’

* * * *

Though thou be blind or have an halt,
 Or in thy face deformed ill,
 If it come not by thy default
 No man should thee reprove by skill ;
 Blame not thy Lord, it is His will ;
 Spurn not thy foot against the wall,
 But with meek heart and prayer still
 Obey, and thank thy God of all.”

“ Yes, I like those quaint old lines,” he said when he had finished, “ and I often think of them ; but, Aunt Harriet, I have not a meek heart, and sometimes life seems so dreary that I cannot help repining at my lot.”

His aunt did not reply as some would have done that he must have patience, that he had many blessings, that discontent was sinful, &c., &c. She took up the lines about S. Louis again, and said simply and naturally, “ God is very good to us, when He denies us one gift He gives us another, perhaps a better one instead, and gradually we learn to thank Him for what He withholds as well as for what He gives. Many have been the powerful minds united to weak bodies, who have tri-

umphed over opposing circumstances, and done more for the glory of God, and the good of their fellows, than thousands of others whose physical powers have been greater."

"Then you think," exclaimed Rafe, with a glorious light flashing up into his beautiful eyes, "you think I need not despair, you believe I really have powers of mind, that my dreams and hopes are not all delusions proceeding from my own vanity?"

"I think as I have long thought, that you have a fine clear intellect, and a poetical imagination, with a very deep feeling for all that is beautiful and exalted; and that it rests with you to turn all these powers to account by perseverance and manly energy. I know that with your weak health it must be a great struggle not to yield to indolence and self-indulgence, or give way to repinings at not being able to do so much as others; but this is just the temptation that you have to fight against, and if you struggle bravely you will prove yourself a true knight."

"That is just what Maud said," Rafe answered thoughtfully.

"Maud?" inquired Miss Eden in surprise.

"Yes, and oh! Aunt Harriet, if you knew what beautiful ideas that child has. I wish you could see her poetry, and the queer sort of allegories she writes sometimes. She is a genius and no mistake, and yet so humble and diffident, not liking to show her things to any one but me, because she says they are so bad."

"Poor little woman!" said Miss Eden smiling, "I am sometimes rather inconveniently reminded of her poetic faculty; as for instance this morning, when Anna discovered her scribbling verses, instead of writing her copy, and begged me to administer a little lecture."

"Oh! that copy," said Rafe pettishly, "it is the torment of Maud's life."

"But a great deal better for her than too much poetizing, and seriously, Rafe, you should not encourage her in such constant scribbling, she is almost too precocious."

Rafe looked and felt annoyed. "I can't argue, it makes my head ache," he said quite crossly.

His aunt glanced at him quietly from under her fringed eyelids. "You had better lie quite down and rest," she said gently; "we have talked enough this afternoon. I am going down stairs for a few minutes to see how grandmamma is getting on." She went, and Rafe muttered disconsolately to himself that nothing would ever make her appreciate Maud properly. He could not hear the murmur in her heart, "so gifted and so beautiful, Maud is a dangerous charge; may we only train her rightly;" and he *would* not see that the severity of which he complained was dictated by the truest and most unselfish affection. His aunt had not been gone long, when Maud herself tapped at the door; she came hesitatingly, but advanced with firmer step, when she saw that Rafe was alone. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes looked

heavy ; Rafe guessed directly that the morning had not passed without tears.

"Come and sit on my bed, Lady Maud," he said caressingly.

"I should like it, but would Aunt Harriet mind, do you think ? I thought she was here, and I was going to ask her if I might stay a little while with you."

"Oh she won't mind if it pleases me, I am in the best of odours now, you know, and may do as I like ; seriously, Aunt Harriet is very kind to me."

"She is always so nice when one is ill," said Maud warmly ; "Oh ! Rafe, I think there's nobody like her—if only—"

"Only what ?"

"If she would trust me a little more—if she would believe that I do mean to be good."

The tears began to fall, though when Rafe kissed and soothed her, an April smile shone out and showed the cheerful sunny nature which trouble might overcloud, but could not extinguish.

"That's right," said Rafe cordially, "cheer up ; why you used to be such a merry little woman ; don't you remember how you used to call me 'Peter Grievous ?' I shall think you mean to be *Peterina* of the same name, if you look so doleful."

Maud laughed ; "I know I'm very silly," she said apologetically ; "and it is you who might much better be crying when you have got to stay

in bed all day with that tiresome pain, poor old fellow, dear darling Rafe;" and in an affectionate hug her own sorrows were forgotten.

"What's Mr. Churchill about that he comes here so seldom now?" asked Rafe presently.

"I don't know exactly, but he's doing something very particular. I think he must be painting some great picture; for I heard Aunt Harriet begging him not to work too hard."

"How mad I should be, if I could paint as well as he does, to be obliged only to do pictures for my own amusement; I should like to win fame by them, shouldn't you, Maud?"

Maud reflected a minute, and called to mind what Rafe had told her of Mr. Churchill's wish to be an artist, and his having given it up in obedience to his father, before she answered. "I don't know, Rafe, I think that to feel that I had had such a wish, and had given it up out of love, would make me happier than all the fame in the world."

"What do you mean?" said Rafe, "I don't understand."

"I mean—I mean—that I should like to have some great gift of painting or poetry, or anything like that; not for its own sake, but that I might do something beautiful, and lay it down at the feet of some one I loved, and say, 'there, there, it is for you; I might have won a little fame with it, but I would rather give it to you.'"

"What an extraordinary child you are," said

Rafe, gazing in wonder at the cheeks flushed with enthusiasm, and the soft luminous eyes of the romantic little maiden; "who is this person at whose feet you would like to lay down your gift? Aunt Harriet, I suppose?"

Maud's smile said 'yes,' but her demeanour suddenly changed. "There she is!" she exclaimed as a footstep was heard ascending the stairs, and she jumped off the bed in most undignified haste, smoothing down her burning cheeks with her hands, as if she could so efface their crimson dye, and whispering, "Oh! Rafe, what shall I do? she will see how hot I look, and will say I have been exciting myself; oh! dear, how silly I am that I can't talk of anything I care for without getting like a great poppy."

"More like a red and white camellia a great deal," said Rafe smiling; "never mind, I'll defend you."

There was no need for his championship. Aunt Harriet did not notice Maud save by a passing look, but came up straight to the bed, and said cheerfully, "How is my patient getting on? try to make haste and get well, Rafe, for I have a journey in prospect for you. You were wishing for a little change this morning, and now I am planning for you a visit to Brighton. Mr. Churchill has heard of a German doctor, who has been most successful in such cases as yours, and it seems he is coming to Brighton for a while to give some lectures and see patients; so I have decided to take you there as soon as you are well enough, to consult him about

you; and perhaps we may be able to stay at Brighton for a week or too."

"I like the Brighton part of it, but not the doctor," returned Rafe; "I daresay he is some horrid old quack, who will half poison me with his odious physic, and then pack off to Germany with his ill-gotten gains."

"Now, Rafe, you are a naughty boy," said Miss Eden, smiling; "do you suppose I would trust your case to any such person? Mr. Churchill has made every inquiry for me about this Dr. Meinhels, and I have just been talking to Mr. Nicholls about him, and he says he has heard the highest report of him for medical skill, and advises me by all means to consult him about you."

"All very fine," growled Rafe, "but I don't believe in doctors, and I hate them. By the by, can this wretched old fellow speak English, or shall I have the plague of hammering out Anglo-German sentences,—'Ich habe meinen Rücken gebrochen, Herr Doctor, können Sie es menden?'"¹

"No, no, Rafe, that singular patois of yours will not be needed; the doctor can both understand and speak English perfectly."

"Something after the fashion of the self-satisfied Frenchman, who announced, 'I spikes de English beautiful,'" returned the provoking boy.

"If so, he will at least have the merit of amusing you," said Miss Eden, good-humouredly, "but seriously, Rafe, I must not have you set yourself

¹ "I have broken my back, doctor, can you mend it?"

against this plan of mine; we all hope much from it, and grandmamma is delighted with it."

"You will like to see Brighton, Rafe," said Maud, who had not spoken till now.

"Yes, I suppose I shall, and the old doctor must be put up with. Nasty old fellow! I can just fancy him smelling of smoke and beer, as they say all Germans do, and poking his old fingers up and down my spine till I shall wish myself an unvertebrated animal."

"Oh, you silly boy," said Maud, caressing him, as if silliness were a virtue, and Miss Eden laughed and left Rafe to her expostulations, as she had some arrangements to make downstairs.

Rafe was so accustomed to oppose every plan for his own good, that as a matter of course he continued to rail against the idea of the German doctor, and quite distressed grandmamma by the vehemence of his objections; but in his secret heart he was not ill-pleased at the scheme, and in the midst of his assumed displeasure, a mischievous gleeful smile lurked in his eyes, which soon showed Aunt Harriet the real state of the case. So she continued quietly to make her arrangements, and when Rafe seemed able to travel, wrote to a friend in Brighton to engage rooms for her, and received in return a cordial invitation to herself and Rafe, to take up their quarters in her friend's house, for as long as they would consent to remain. All seemed to promise well for the undertaking, ere long the day for the journey was actually fixed,

and Rafe suddenly dropping his tone of opposition, became interested in the preparations, and insisted on such large provision being made in the way of wraps and comforts, that Charlie compared him to that celebrated old gentleman who warmed the handle of his umbrella, lest he should take cold by touching it.



CHAPTER XIII.

MR. CHURCHILL BECOMES BEAR-LEADER.

MISS EDEN'S well-laid plans were not destined to come to a happy conclusion. On the day before that on which Rafe and she were to have started for Brighton, Mrs. Eden was seized with an attack of illness so serious as to make it impossible for her daughter to leave her.

Poor Rafe grumbled as much at the frustration of the scheme as he had done when it was first proposed to him; prophesied that before grand-mamma got better the doctor would have left Brighton, and took so gloomy a view of the affair altogether that Miss Eden was obliged to feign a cheerfulness she did not feel in order to reassure him. Between disappointment on his account, and anxiety on her mother's, she had a weary day of it; and when at last, late in the afternoon, Mrs. Eden sank into a short slumber, and she was free to leave her room for a few minutes, she paused a moment on the landing, too utterly tired and dispirited to

be able to betake herself at once to the task of consoling Rafe. A shout of laughter, and a sound of eager merry voices in the hall below, roused her into energy again, and she hastened down to enforce the quiet so necessary to her mother's repose.

To her surprise, she found Charlie, Maud, and Dora executing a sort of "*pas de triomphe*" round a gay scarlet-coated gentleman, who was declaring himself too muddy to be touched, and playfully threatening them with his riding whip when they approached too near. Those clear kindly tones, and arch smiling eyes, could belong to no other than Mr. Churchill, and to the children's great disappointment their aunt did not seem to have a moment's doubt of the huntsman's identity. Her face brightened at seeing him, but was still pale and sad enough to elicit the anxious inquiry, "Are you ill, Harriet; is anything the matter?" and Mr. Churchill's smile died away into regret when he heard the cause of her mournful looks.

"And I have been the unwitting cause of a riot," he said apologetically, "these sprites in their enthusiasm for my gaudy costume forgot to tell me that anything was amiss; nay, I am sure, forgot even the fact, or they would have put a check upon their mirth."

"We have been ever so quiet all the rest of the day," said Charlie, with rather an injured expression, while Maud with a deprecating glance towards her aunt faltered out, "I am sorry I made a noise, I ought to have remembered grandmamma," and

without one attempt at an excuse took Dora's hand and stole quietly away to the school-room.

Mr. Churchill beguiled Harriet into lying down on the dining-room sofa while she gave him the history of her troubles. There was some consolation even in the fact of being able to tell them all out to so sympathizing a listener, and one too, who, not content with words, had some active help to offer, for when she had finished speaking he startled her by the proposition that he should undertake the task she was obliged to relinquish, and convey Rafe to Brighton.

"Oh, thank you, it is so kind of you, dear Arthur, but it would never do," was her first hasty decision; but subsequent entreaty and argument on his part induced her to think it less impossible.

"I am afraid Rafe would not like it, and that he would be tiresome," she objected despondingly; but Mr. Churchill would not be daunted.

"Never mind, I don't care if he is," he answered good-humouredly; "it will be a good exercise of patience for me. We shall do very well I have no doubt, and you may be sure I will take the best of care of your boy for you. If you agree to my plan I will send my trusty servitor Anson off to-night, to engage rooms for us at the best hotel he can find, (for you must not inflict me on your hospitable friend,) and Rafe shall be as well attended to as your heart can wish. Won't that do, Harriet?"

He looked as beseeching as though he were

asking a personal favour, and if Miss Eden could only have been as sure of Rafe's good behaviour as she felt of his kindness, she would have given her consent in a moment.

"I am afraid even if I could get Rafe to go with you he would give you nothing but trouble," she said sadly, "he is such a strange being, you would never be able to manage him."

Mr. Churchill looked incredulous. "I think we should get on better than you expect, Harriet," he said with unabated cheerfulness, "we should become better acquainted, and find out one another's good qualities; you don't know what an agreeable fellow I can be when I choose."

"Don't I?" said Miss Eden smiling; "oh; it is not you I am afraid of, Arthur, but my poor Rafe is such a very 'contrary young gentleman,' as old nurse used to say, that I cannot answer for what he might do. And then—your painting, I thought you were bent on finishing it so as to be ready for Easter Sunday."

"It is done, I finished it yesterday, or do you think I should have been out hunting? I did rather wish to have watched its being put up, but never mind, my uncle will see to that; don't let it stand in the way of this scheme a moment."

"There is an old proverb about a wilful man," said Miss Eden, playfully, as she rose from her recumbent posture, "so I suppose you will carry your point. It is so very good of you to have thought of this plan, that I cannot say no; I will

go and talk to Rafe ; I only hope he will not keep me arguing for an hour, for I expect my dear mother to wake every minute, and then I shall be wanted."

"Don't let him keep you, you should not allow arguing ; tell him the thing is to be done, and you'll find he'll do it."

Miss Eden looked at the manly determined face with which these words were spoken, and said half laughing, "I am afraid he is beyond that simple style of management, at least from me. He generally minds mamma when she speaks, but she seldom will ; I cannot persuade her that she is the great authority in the house ; she makes me do all the tyrannizing."

"Well, then, tyrannize to some purpose, it is all for your victim's good you know. I think the mere change of air and scene, let alone the doctor, will be of benefit to him."

Harriet quite thought so too, but she could not venture to flatter herself that Rafe would consent, without a battle, to being put under Mr. Churchill's care. It was not that he so much disliked the being left to his companionship, as that his pride revolted at the idea of accepting this new kindness from one to whom he had behaved so ungratefully.

Aunt Harriet persuaded, reasoned, and entreated in vain, till at last remembering what Mr. Churchill had said about not allowing arguing, she quietly remarked, "I am sorry you set yourself against this, Rafe, for I am afraid you will have to yield in

the end. I am sure grandmamma will wish it," and to her surprise, received the muttered answer, "Well, if I am to go I must, and it won't be my fault if Mr. Churchill is bothered with me. So long as it's no doing of mine, I don't so much care, but I should have thought he would rather have taken charge of a bear than me." After which, Rafe made no more opposition, only testifying displeasure by a confirmed sulkiness of demeanour, which did not promise much for poor Mr. Churchill's comfort in the proposed expedition.

To say the truth, King Arthur was by no means delighted at the prospect of having his nephew elect placed under his sole care, but he had so long established in his own mind as a fact, that it was no matter whether he liked a thing or not, if it was right and ought to be done, that he did not for a moment hesitate in undertaking this troublesome task. "It will relieve Harriet's mind, and be a real service to her," he thought. That reflection went a long way towards sweetening all unpleasant anticipations, so he cheerfully made his arrangements for the journey, and at eleven o'clock the next morning, his large seldom-used family-carriage, with its two fat chesnut horses, drew up at Mrs. Eden's door, ready to convey Rafe and himself to Naresborough, the nearest railway station.

The good news that Mrs. Eden had slept comfortably, and was a trifle better, met him on the threshold, in Cissy's most cordial tones, and pre-

sently down came Rafe, muffled up for the journey, flushed with excitement, and looking unusually handsome, but with a most provokingly proud 'stand off' expression in his eyes and on his lips.

His black looks were a great contrast to his aunt's smiling gratitude. "You are my William of Deloraine, good at need," she said, softly to Mr. Churchill, and with a glance towards Rafe, she added almost beseechingly, "Have patience with my naughty boy; some day he will be wiser and thank you as I do."

King's Arthur's smile was a full assurance of his forbearing intentions, and nothing could be kinder than his manner towards Rafe, but despite his friendly overtures, Rafe's sulky mood prevailed, and the short drive was passed in almost total silence.

In the train they were joined by Mr. Walsingham, who seemed surprised at seeing them, and displayed a little languid curiosity on the subject of their errand. To Rafe's great satisfaction, Mr. Churchill did not enlighten him, so after explaining that his own journey was to see his younger sister, who had been taken ill at a boarding school at Brighton, Mr. Walsingham diverged to the fertile subject of politics, and the two gentlemen were soon deep in a discussion on the enlargement of the franchise, and the council of education, which left Rafe free to watch the pretty down country through which they were passing, and weave a series of idylls to correspond therewith.

He roused himself at length from an engrossing reverie, to listen to something that Mr. Churchill was saying about the statue of Arnold von Winkelried, at Stanz, in the canton of Unterwalden, and found that they had passed from politics, and were reviving some recollections of a tour which they had made together, during an Oxford "long."

"Arnold von Winkelried, who was he?" drawled Mr. Walsingham, "what did he do? I really forget."

"Oh!" exclaimed Rafe, impetuously, "have you forgotten Wordsworth's lines?—

' And he of battle martyrs chief
Who to recal his daunted peers,
For victory shaped an open space,
By gathering in a wide embrace,
Into his single heart a sheaf
Of fatal Austrian spears.'

Don't you remember, he was a knight of Unterwalden, who helped to win the battle of Sempach for the Swiss, by rushing on the line of Austrian spears, and catching a number in his arms, pressing them against his breast as he fell, and thus opening a gap in the enemy's ranks, through which the Swiss forced their way to victory? Oh! he was a glorious fellow!"

"So it seems," said Mr. Walsingham, drily, "but it sounds very mythical, and I must confess I had forgotten all about it. I am not so fresh from the schoolroom as you are, you know."

Rafe coloured high. "Mr. Churchill knows all

about him, I am sure," said he, "for he has painted a beautiful little picture called 'an echo of patriotism,' which represents a little Swiss boy looking up at Arnold's statue, and vowing to love and serve his country as he did."

"Vowing! how is that put in the picture?" said the tiresome Mr. Walsingham, "has he a little speech coming out of his mouth, like the people in Punch?"

Rafe was too indignant to reply, and felt quite annoyed at Mr. Churchill's ready laugh. "Was it not at Stanz that Nicholas von der Flue, the hermit of Saxeln, made that beautiful speech about union, to persuade the diet to receive Soleure and Friburg into the confederacy?" he asked, almost turning his back on Mr. Walsingham, in the excess of his disdain.

"Yes, and all the bells from the Alps to the Jura rang out to proclaim the reconciliation: what a joyful sound that must have been!"

"An awful row," said Mr. Walsingham, who seemed to enjoy Rafe's indignation amazingly, "pray don't get on historical reminiscences, Churchill, or we shall never have done. I shall begin to think you have entered into a conspiracy to improve my mind for me."

"There is certainly room for improvement," muttered Rafe to himself, too low for Mr. Walsingham to hear, but Mr. Churchill caught the words, and with a look half amused, half warning, turned away from him, and renewed the interrupted

conversation with his friend. Rafe listened with interest, as they recalled the adventures they had met with in their ascent of the Righi, but when he wanted to hear about the chapel of 'Our Lady of the snow,' which they had passed on the way, and to persuade Mr. Churchill into a description of the beautiful view from the summit of the mountain, Mr. Walsingham *would* tell anecdotes of their fellow-tourists, and talk of a wonderful luncheon they had made on that occasion, when all the knives, forks, and spoons had been forgotten, and they were obliged to assist themselves to the viands with a few small penknives, and a pair of knitting-needles belonging to a lady of the party, which they used after the fashion of chopsticks.

Poor Rafe! he had certainly not yet learnt the lesson of toleration; he felt quite angry with Mr. Walsingham, and even with Mr. Churchill, for his polite acquiescence in his friend's choice of subjects: and he was glad when at length the Brighton terminus was reached, and he caught sight of Anson, standing ready with a fly, which was to convey him safe to the hotel, and away from the odious Mr. Walsingham.

They had scarcely parted from the latter before Rafe broke out into a perfect diatribe against him, to which Mr. Churchill listened with a smile of good-humoured indifference, so plainly indicating that he did not think it worth while to refute the exaggerated accusations of a boy, that Rafe mortified and abashed, sank into an offended silence,

from which no kind looks or friendly words sufficed to rouse him.

In secret he felt pleased at the large airy rooms of the hotel, and rejoiced in their seaward view, but no hint of satisfaction escaped his lips, and he partook of the luxurious dinner provided for him with an injured air, which caused King Arthur some internal amusement, though at the same time he was rather distressed at such an unprosperous beginning of their intercourse.

In the evening, seeing that Rafe seemed too wearied to be able to amuse himself, Mr. Churchill proposed to read aloud to him, and after a few chillingly polite speeches, to the effect that "Rafe hoped he would not put himself out of his way to do so, as he was not in want of amusement, etc., etc.," the proposal was acceded to, and a pleasant hour was spent over a memoir of Henri de la Rochejacquelin, in which they both became so much interested that all grievances were forgotten.

It sent Rafe to bed, with a more amiable face than he had worn all the day, and in return for Mr. Churchill's cordial 'Good night, I hope you will rest well,' he actually humbled himself sufficiently to make a half apology for his bearishness by saying, "I am sure I am much obliged to you for what you have done to make me comfortable, I am sorry you should have such a disagreeable charge as I am," which somewhat clumsy attempt at graciousness was received by King Arthur with a quite disproportionate satisfaction.

"We shall get on very well after all," he said to himself, when Rafe had departed to his room; and with his faculty for looking at the bright side of everything, he soon persuaded himself that all would go as smoothly as he had predicted to Harriet. "Only I shall feel dreadfully tempted to tell this poor sulky boy a bit of my mind now I have got him all to myself," was his smiling soliloquy; "not that I intend to though, for it seldom does any good, and by the by, what an ill-natured thing one's mind must be when a bit of it always implies something censorious and disagreeable."



CHAPTER XIV.

THE GERMAN DOCTOR.

Rafe passed a somewhat restless night, and awoke in the morning unrefreshed, and very much disposed to be cross. There was nothing to find fault with in the comfortable breakfast, nor in Anson's manner of waiting on him; and so he kept his feelings of irritability to himself, though, alas! without trying to subdue them.

By eleven o'clock he was dressed, and ready for the fly which was to convey him to the lodging where Herr Meinhels had taken up his temporary abode. He returned very short and very sullen answers to Mr. Churchill's cheerful greetings, and poor King Arthur, who had thought his speech of the night before a prelude to a better state of things, was sadly disappointed, and a good deal perplexed.

The drive passed in almost total silence, and when Mr. Churchill and Rafe were ushered into the doctor's presence they looked like personifications of good and ill humour.

Herr Meinhels was a pale intellectual noble

looking man of about sixty, with a countenance in which, though some might only have seen sternness, others would have discovered much unobtrusive benevolence. He greeted them in perfectly correct English, though tinged with an accent strongly foreign, and his clear penetrating eye rested at once upon Rafe, as if even from his countenance he hoped to discover something of the nature of his disorder.

After a long and grave consultation on every point of his malady, the doctor suddenly turned to Mr. Churchill, and asked abruptly, "What do you consider this young gentleman's disposition?"

Rafe coloured indignantly, and Mr. Churchill looked at once too much amused, surprised, and puzzled to reply.

"You think this question odd," said Herr Meinhels in soft deliberate tones; "but I assure you it is of importance. Perhaps you would prefer answering it yourself," he added, turning to Rafe; "you look an honest and truthful boy, so tell me now candidly whether your disposition does not incline you to be sullen and irritable, and whether this irritability does not increase in proportion with the pain you suffer."

"Yes," said Rafe, speaking sorely against his will, "I mean—I suppose—I am what you say. I know the pain drives me nearly wild sometimes; but what can it matter" (to you, he would have liked to have said) "whether I am cross or not?"

"Excuse me, it does matter very much; but do

I understand you to mean that your faults of temper are caused solely by the pain?"

Rafe was silent.

"Ah!" said the doctor sighing, "I dare say you think so, I know many sufferers who do; meanwhile the excitement of mind thus engendered reacts upon them and does them harm. I have seen it all over and over again; it is a miserable state of affairs."

Rafe looked utterly abashed, and Mr. Churchill felt so sorry for him that he interposed hastily with, "We must not take it for granted that your patient always gives way to these unhappy feelings, which must indeed be very difficult to resist; I am sure he often struggles against them: do you not, Rafe?"

The truthful conscience of the boy would not answer in the affirmative; Mr. Churchill, with his habits of severe self-control, could little guess how completely under plea of illness Rafe had allowed his naturally impatient repining temper to get the victory over him. .

"You think I speak harshly," the doctor resumed, "but I do not mean it so; I have a son, my eldest, afflicted as you are, nay more so, for his disease is past cure, while in your's there is much room for hope. His came on when he was seven years old, (the result like yours of an accident,) and in a few months he was transformed from a fine healthy boy into a sickly miserable little creature, always pining and fretful. I took him to a

very good and very wise friend of mine (one of my own profession) to ask his advice; the first thing he said to me was, 'Cure his temper, nothing can be worse for him than to be allowed to cry and fret about everything.' I said this seemed to me impossible, for how could one punish a creature so afflicted? and he was almost too young to be impressed by reason; but to my surprise, while I was still speaking, my little son interrupted me with— 'Father, it would be easier for me to be good if you reprov'd me when I am naughty as you do Wilhelm (his younger brother); when I first was ill I used to try not to be peevish lest you should be angry with me, but when I found you were not I did not try so much.' After this, I determined to endeavour to subdue in my Ernst by gentle discipline this irritability which before I had excused in him; and I have, God be thanked, succeeded so well that now you would not find in all Germany one more gentle or uncomplaining than he. His affliction is deprived of half its sting by the way in which he bears it, and spite of his feeble frame I have more joy in looking at him than at any of my other children. Pardon me this long story, I have told it you that you may see I do not speak in ignorance."

"Rafe," said Mr. Churchill gently, "has not been so fortunate as your little son, in having a wise father at hand to check and counsel him; he was left an orphan at ten years old, just at the time in fact that his illness came on, and has been

brought up by an indulgent grandmother and aunts."

"Then you must be your own monitor," said the good German, turning with a compassionate and kindly air to the poor fatherless boy, "you must make for yourself a system of self-discipline in which no quarter shall be allowed to even the least angry or impatient feeling; no one but yourself can know how difficult this will be, but one day you will be able to show us the blessed effects of such a course. I could tell you a great deal of the physical good that will accrue to you if you follow this plan, but I think if I have read your countenance rightly that you will not be content with any but the highest motives.

"For the rest, I will write down my advice as to your medical treatment, (remember, especially, that I wish you to be as much in the open air as possible,) and I think if it could be managed, a visit to some of our German baths next autumn would be of service to you."

"I don't suppose that will be practicable," said Rafe, rousing himself from the self-accusing reverie into which the doctor's former words had thrown him.

"We will make it so," said Mr. Churchill, hopefully, "and à propos of this, does not your Uncle Mortimer go to Carlsbad almost every year, Rafe?"

"Mr. Mortimer of No. —, Green Street?" inquired Herr Meinhels, with eager interest.

"Yes, do you know him? he is my great uncle," said Rafe, in surprise.

"I have long known him in one way, for we have carried on a scientific correspondence for years. You are doubtless aware that he has made some important discoveries in the science of geology, a subject which I have deeply studied ; some remarks of his repeated to me by a mutual friend, induced me to put myself into communication with him, and since I came to England our scientific intercourse has ripened into a lively friendship. He has promised to pay me a visit in my home at Königsbad next autumn, and it would perhaps be possible to arrange your coming with him."

"Scarcely," said Rafe, "I have seen so little of him, he does not know me or care for me, and I could not for the world have him burden himself with me out of pity."

"For the world," echoed the German, smiling, "you use strong expressions, my young friend, take care that they do not run away with you. At the end of a week I shall be returning to London, and shall see your uncle ; with your permission, I will tell him that I have been consulted about you, and what I have advised ; it will then rest with him to further your plans or not as he may feel inclined."

"You will not be able to give him a very prepossessing report of me," said Rafe, in a tone that was meant to be playful, though his lip quivered with the emotions of wounded pride, which had been welling up in his heart throughout the whole conversation.

"We shall see," said the doctor, with an arch twinkle in his thoughtful eyes, "I must ask you to come to me again at the end of the week, and as this is Tuesday, you will have Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, in which to cultivate those good qualities you no doubt possess, but which you are allowing one bad disposition to smother."

"Three days!" said Rafe, with an involuntary smile, accompanied by a crimson blush.

"Yes, three days, and a great deal may be done even in so short a time; do not look incredulous, but try what you can do; you have with you a friend who I can see is ready to assist and counsel you, if you solicit his aid."

Mechanically Rafe looked towards Mr. Churchill, who had risen and was standing near the window; and as his glance fell on that open manly face, and met the answering look of those serene and kindly eyes, it did strike him that he had made a great mistake in so perversely refusing to make friends with one so well fitted to obtain his affection and confidence. His blush deepened, and he looked more downcast than before.

"Nay," said the keen-sighted physician, "do not despond, there is every hope for you since you can bear to be told the truth. You look far more gentle and amiable now than when you entered the room, and yet you have been hearing what is never pleasant to any of us, a lecture upon your faults. I must appear to you a strange sermonizing old man, but I have studied many things beside physic,

and am convinced that character influences health more than is 'commonly supposed. Now good-day to you, and pardon my plainness of speech."

He took Rafe's hand with frank and fatherly kindness, and Rafe responded politely and even gratefully to the cordial pressure. "I am much obliged to you," he said, with his air of proud candour, "thank you for speaking openly, and without any humbug, and for telling me about your son, I shall often think of him."

The drive back to the hotel was as silent (but with what a different sort of silence) as the drive from it had been; Rafe was deep in thought, and Mr. Churchill judged it best to leave him undisturbed.

Little was said by either until the afternoon, when just as King Arthur was finishing a long letter to Miss Eden, concerning Rafe, the boy lifted his head from the book in which he had appeared engrossed, and said hurriedly, "Will you please tell Aunt Harriet that I will write to her to-morrow, I don't feel as if I *could* to-day. I don't mean," he added, seeing Mr. Churchill's anxious glance towards him, "that I am too unwell to do so, but I—somehow I can't help thinking over what Herr Meinhels said."

"I am sure that she would be glad that you *should* think of that," said Mr. Churchill kindly. Rafe did not reply, and the letter was finished in silence, but as soon as it was despatched, Mr. Churchill drew an armchair to the fire, and inviting

Rafe to take it, took a smaller chair for himself, and sat down as if prepared to talk. At first it seemed as if he were to have all the talk to himself, for he got only absent and monosyllabic answers in return for his various remarks, but at last, after a pause of some minutes, Rafe raised himself in his chair, and said in a shame-faced yet eager manner, "You must not think I am sulking again because I have answered shortly, but there is something I want to say to you, and I don't know how to say it."

"Can I help you in any way? if so, speak out, why should you be afraid of me?" said Mr. Churchill, in his most cordial tones.

"I am not afraid, but ashamed, you have been so very kind to me, and I have been so very ungrateful. I know it is too late now to atone for the past, and it would be ridiculous to suppose that you could ever like me, or care whether I liked you or not, after the way I have behaved, but still I thought I ought to tell you that I am sorry, and I am indeed, though perhaps you may not believe me."

Rafe said this in a perfect agony of blushing, and with a manner that was almost tragic in its melancholy and solemnity. A good-natured smile, scarcely concealed, hovered round Mr. Churchill's lips, but he answered with laudable gravity, "I do believe it very readily, and I am not as indifferent as you suppose to your liking or disliking me, on the contrary, I should be very glad to think that

you liked me, and were willing to accept me as a friend. Suppose we make a compact of friendship and confidence for the future, come, shake hands over it."

He held out his hand with a frank good humour impossible to resist, and though Rafe was a good deal astonished at this unsentimental and matter-of-fact way of proceeding, and would have preferred a more deliberate and dignified reconciliation, he returned the cordial grasp as best he might, and stammered out some inaudible thanks.

There was again a silence of several minutes; Rafe really wished to confide in Mr. Churchill, but found it difficult to condense his highly-wrought feelings into words sufficiently quiet and sensible to be fit for the occasion. He had been thinking over his short-comings till he had become not only penitent, but utterly despondent and miserable, and a choking hysteric sensation in his throat, (the effect of his physical weakness,) made it difficult for him to avoid expressing his emotion in sobs and tears, which he felt Mr. Churchill would consider as weak and womanish.

King Arthur was the first to speak. "You know, Rafe," he said kindly, "if we are to be friends, you must let me help you in any way I can. You must talk to me as if I were your elder brother, and instead of thinking that I shall think so and so, just speak out plainly, and tell me whatever you feel inclined."

Rafe choked down his emotion, and answered as

firmly as he could, "Then I wish, if you don't mind, you would tell me all my faults."

Here was a charming opportunity for King Arthur to express that "bit of his mind" which he had often felt so tempted to declare! Strange to say, he did not seem disposed to avail himself of it; no triumph, only surprise, and a little dismay were visible in his bright eyes.

"That is more the duty of a father confessor than of an elder brother, is it not?" he said smiling. "I think you must know your own faults much better than I do, and it might endanger our newly formed alliance, if I were to turn censor all at once."

"Not when I ask it," said Rafe, with gloomy determination, "and you are more likely to be able to tell me truly than any one else I know, because you are not blinded by partiality, as grandmamma, and my aunts, and sisters are. You need not fear my being offended, for I know without your telling me a great part of your opinion of me; I know that you think me proud, and self-willed, and ill-tempered, and impertinent, and I have seen in your face hundreds of times, that you think they spoil me at home."

King Arthur made a slight grimace. "Either my face is very transparent, or you are a very good physiognomist," he said laughingly, "of course you have considered me a dreadful barbarian for entertaining such hard thoughts of you; I wonder you did not arrive at hating me."

"No, I didn't, I couldn't," answered Rafe, wincing a little under the light tone. "I knew all the time that you were in the right, and lately, since I have known how you were brought up yourself, I have seen that it is only natural you should take rather stricter views than other people. Adele once tried to persuade me that you were harsh and tyrannical, and that I was quite justified in behaving ill to you, but I never believed her for a moment, though I may have acted as if I did."

"Much obliged to her for her good opinion, I am sure," said Mr. Churchill, archly and demurely.

"There," said Rafe, half laughing, and yet very much vexed, "that is what I can't make out about you, sir; you seem so seldom quite serious, I always feel as if you were laughing at me; and yet you are not like the other merry people I have known, easy-going and self-indulgent, whom one could get round, as it were, by joining in their joke; you remain as formidable as ever, spite of your smiles and good-humour."

"Dear me," said the young man, with an affectation of extraordinary gravity, though his eyes overflowed with drollery and mischief, "I seem to be a very odd disagreeable sort of person, what can be done about it? I think you had better tell me all my faults instead of my telling you yours, as you seem to know so much about me."

Rafe coloured and threw himself back in his chair without speaking. After a few minutes, Mr. Churchill glancing at him, saw to his surprise that

tears were trickling from under his long eyelashes, and that his slight frame was heaving with the sobs which he was vainly endeavouring to repress.

"My dear boy," he exclaimed, bending over him with inexpressible gentleness, and speaking in a tone from which all bantering had vanished, "are you ill, or are you fancying some fresh cruelty on my part? I did not mean to laugh at you, believe me, only to persuade you into dropping that *very* tragic tone."

"I know," said poor Rafe, struggling with the hysteric weeping which was almost beyond his own control, "I'm very silly, but I have felt so unhappy ever since this morning, and now that I am not very strong I"—a fresh burst of sobs cut short his apology, and Mr. Churchill going to the sideboard, mixed some wine and water, and bringing it to him, made him drink it. "Now you are to lie down a little while," he said kindly, but imperatively, "and to try to be quite quiet for a few minutes, then when you are better, you shall tell me all that distresses you, and we will consult about it, and see if we cannot find some comfort."

Rafe mutely obeyed, and in a few minutes his sobs ceased, and he pronounced himself quite well again; he would fain have sat up and talked immediately, but Mr. Churchill bade him lie still, adding with a lovely smile that would have beguiled almost any one into obedience, "You see I must keep up my character of tyrant." After a while however, he allowed Rafe to resume his seat

in the arm-chair, and begin his tale of grief. The long reserve of years was broken through, the long pent-up story of self-dissatisfaction and sorrow was poured at last into the ears which *had* seemed the most unlikely ever to receive it.

Mr. Churchill listened attentively, and wished himself a woman, that he might have sympathized and consoled as only women can, but it was better as it was, for Rafe relied on his judgment more than he would have done on any woman's, and was in too humble a mood to feel affronted at the uncompromising truthfulness of character which made King Arthur refrain from any of those good-natured palliative speeches, by which well-meaning, but less scrupulous persons, seek to skin over the wounds in their friends' consciences, and make, as they say, "all smooth again."

The sentimental, melodramatic tone in which Rafe had commenced the acknowledgment of his errors, had now given way to the unaffected earnestness of true humility; he had ceased to think what Mr. Churchill might think of him, and made his confession with all the candour of a child. Then leaning forward in his chair, and turning his beautiful eyes appealingly towards his attentive auditor, he added with simplicity, "And now what ought I to do?"

"If you really wish me to tell you, I should say, begin by giving up your self-will. Ask yourself whether it is not self-will which has caused most of the ill-humour that you so lament. Have you not

been perpetually striving after your own way, and has not every command of your aunts, or every wish of any one's that has interfered with this, aroused a sense of injury in your mind, and made you give way to hasty words or thoughts?"

Rafe gave an almost inaudible assent.

"And can you not understand," continued Mr. Churchill, "what a happy calm there is in the heart which has given up all this strife for victory, which is ever ready to meet the will and wishes of others, which has laid aside the thought of self-pleasing? Thomas à Kempis truly says, 'forsake thyself, resign thyself, and thou shalt enjoy much inward peace,' and when we have once settled with ourselves that it does not really matter whether we are pleased or no, so that we please God and our brethren, hard things will become easy to us, and what we once called unbearable will be borne patiently and stoutly, and restless, angry emotions will wither and die."

Rafe drank in the gently uttered words, as if this was precisely the advice that he most needed; presently he said, "Sometimes it is not exactly self-will which makes me feel angry, but vexation at some injustice, or prejudice, or folly, which I think I see in other people; more especially at their stupidity, as for instance when I feel out of patience with Cissy's way of not understanding things. It seems then as if I could not help being out of patience and saying sharp things, though of course I ought to help it."

"Perhaps I may admit that to a certain extent you cannot help it,—I mean that in your present weak and sensitive state you cannot help the first emotion of vexation,—but you may and should resolutely refrain from giving it outward expression, and the inward feeling should be, to use Jeremy Taylor's words, 'wiped off by a sigh, and a sad thought, and a holy prayer, before it grows to any strength.' It is well when one is provoked by any one's dulness or mistakes, to bethink oneself in silence of other points in which they excel ourselves, or to remember their kindness towards us, and how much they have done to deserve patience at our hands. For the rest I must remind you, (to quote Bishop Taylor again) 'he who would cure his anger should pray often.'"

"Yes," said Rafe, colouring crimson, "I am afraid I have not thought enough of that,—I mean I have prayed against anger more as a matter of course than with a real desire to have it subdued in me; but this,"—and he hid his burning face against the chair,—“is not what one can talk of.”

There was a silence of several minutes, then Mr. Churchill said kindly, "One thing more before we leave this subject,—have you ever seen Bishop Taylor's beautiful prayer against temper? I think it is one that you might make your own."

"No, I have never seen it," Rafe replied; "have you got it; will you show it me?"

Mr. Churchill answered by drawing from his

pocket a small manuscript book, and putting it into Rafe's hand, open at a certain page. He read it attentively, and more than once. "It seems meant for me," he earnestly exclaimed: "this piece, 'Let me not be moved with every trifling mistake in the conversation and intercourse of others;' and this again, 'Let no sickness or disappointment, no employment or weariness render me ungente or unthankful to them that minister to me.' Oh! I like it so much."

"I will copy it for you," said Mr. Churchill, holding out his hand for the book: "I only hope you may find it as useful as I have done."

"But you can never have needed it?"

"More than you fancy, but that is nothing to the purpose. Here is Anson with our tea."

The evening was passed in quiet reading, with only the occasional interchange of a friendly word. Just before nine o'clock Mr. Churchill stole a glance at Rafe, and seeing that he had laid down his book, and was looking very weary, recommended him to go to bed. Rafe's habitual 'no thank you' rose to his lips, and he began to read again, as if he would fain put off the appearance of fatigue. Soon however he gave vent to an irrepressible yawn, and Mr. Churchill with a smile bent down, and putting his hand over the book, said playfully, "I thought self-will was to be banished." A scarlet blush told that the hint was not lost; and Rafe rose immediately, and prepared to retire to bed. "Good-night," he said, holding out his hand to

Mr. Churchill, and glancing up at him half shyly, half affectionately, "you have been so kind to me that I think I may venture to ask one thing more: if I forget my resolutions and am going to be cross or self-willed, will you please take the trouble to scold me a little?"

"Certainly," was the laughing answer, "I will be as severe as you like; but remember we are to be fast friends from this time forward." Then as if this scarcely expressed sufficiently the feelings of his kind heart, the young man pressed the boy's thin hand warmly within his own, and murmured an earnest "God bless you!"

How the compact of friendship between them was kept, and how Rafe advanced in the important task of subduing his self-will, may be best seen by an extract from a letter addressed to Miss Eden by Mr. Churchill, on the Monday following the foregoing conversation. "The proverb says that wonders will never cease, and I think it is illustrated in the case of the extraordinary alteration that has taken place in the relations between Rafe and myself. I feel my heart warm to him every day, and there is something quite touching in the affectionate gratitude with which he repays my slightest exertions on his behalf. Ever since our first visit to Herr Meinhels he has been quite a different being from what he was before. I told you of our conversation on the afternoon of that day, and of his quaintly expressed desire that I would 'scold him a little' if necessary, but really since then he

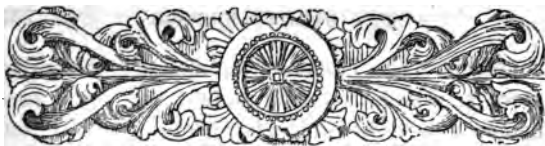
has been so earnest and persevering in his efforts to do right, that there has scarcely been the slightest occasion for reproof of any sort. Sometimes he is inclined to stay up a little too late, or drive a little too far, or sit at the window overlooking the sea when he ought to be lying down, but then I growl a little, and he smiles and submits. Our drives, I must tell you, are taken in style, for I have hired a very presentable mail phaeton, and a most creditable pair of greys to draw the same, and we take an airing every day quite 'en grand seigneur.' We went to the doctor's again on Saturday, a farewell visit, as he returned to London that evening; he said Rafe looked better already, and complimented him on his improved expression of countenance. This may sound ridiculous, but I assure you 'your handsome boy' has worn a peaceful smile during these last few days, which has made him look handsomer than ever, and ten times more pleasing. The Herr thinks Brighton agrees with him, and seemed to wish he should remain here a while longer, so I have determined on staying here at least a fortnight more, a decision with which my young guest is most perfectly content. You will doubtless feel inclined to object to this, but you must not, and if you do, I shall not attend to you. Rafe likes Brighton, admires the ever beautiful sea as much as I do, and seems invigorated by the fresh spring breezes. As for me, I am perfectly happy and comfortable, and far from its being a gêne to me (as you so naughtily insinuate) to have

Rafe under my care, I am beginning to be quite proud of my charge. We have all sorts of discussions together, 'literary, scientific, and *otherwise*,' as a would-be blue lady once said to me, 'otherwise' meaning in her dictionary, I suppose, scandal, dress, &c., but in mine anything too whimsical to be classed under a graver head. Rafe's views on the affairs of this world are half poetical, half misanthropical, and wholly unpractical, and in opposing them I am so forced into the contrary side, that I sometimes fear he will take me for a type of 'Mr. Worldly Wiseman.' He winces a little under my remarks sometimes, and makes me feel very cruel, but I contradict him on principle occasionally, and on the whole he bears it very well. We have plenty of food for our minds, for I brought several books with me, and have bought some more here. We go every day to the beautiful church near us, to Rafe the afternoon service is a great boon. I wish we could have it at Abbotsbrook, but it would be too much for my uncle, and I have not yet been able to bring him to my views about a curate. Your nephew, with a face as bright as sunshine, is challenging me to a literary argument, so I must conclude this scribble; perhaps the glow on his cheeks may be attributable to the frequent use of his name which I have made in the last few minutes."

Mr. Churchill was perfectly correct in saying that Rafe was content to remain at Brighton with him for an additional fortnight, and indeed, not

only in this, but in other things, contentment was gradually becoming the habitual feeling of this once restless and fretful heart. To one who had lived a life of perpetual self-willed opposition, there was a strange and delightful repose in unquestioning obedience and submission, and the intense reverence and admiration with which Mr. Churchill's character began to inspire Rafe, now that he had got over his foolish prejudice, made it much easier for him to obey than it would have been in the case of a more capricious or less estimable person. If Mr. Churchill would have allowed it, Rafe would now have lavished on him an enthusiastic adoring devotion, such as young people often bestow on some one hero of their imagination, while they are perhaps wanting in love and gratitude to those who have the nearest claim on their regard; but King Arthur had no mind to be made an idol of, and when he saw anything which seemed like exaggeration in Rafe's expression of affection towards him he drew back with a certain cold though not unkind reserve, which rather distressed Rafe at the time, but which was good for him in the end. For though it seemed hard at the moment that Mr. Churchill would not accept any self-denial on Rafe's part as a sacrifice of love to him, but merely as a matter of duty, and though he received Rafe's little enthusiastic bursts with a smile that was indifferent, and even slightly satirical, he was so thoroughly kind and considerate towards him in every other way, that Rafe could

not imagine his affection slighted, and was fain to suppress these ornamental parts of it in consideration of Mr. Churchill's matter-of-fact disposition, while the sound feeling of reverential love grew and deepened with each returning day.



CHAPTER XV.

THE CLOUD DISPERSED.

WHILE Rafe was passing his time so happily at Brighton, poor little Maud was going through her daily routine of home duties with a very forlorn and dreary feeling at her heart.

It was a great trial to one who so valued the love and approbation of her elders to feel herself under suspicion, and not be able to speak out and clear herself from blame. Up to the day when she had found that unlucky letter she had been advancing steadily in her Aunt Harriet's good opinion, and now she felt that she had lost all the ground she had so toilsomely gained; and as she saw no prospect of her innocence being explained, she began to despair of ever regaining it. As she was not perfect, these melancholy despairing feelings were a temptation to her to give way to indolence, and neglect difficult duties; but she struggled resolutely against it, and in the midst of her distress an unexpected joy sprang up for her in the

consciousness that Adele was gradually becoming more and more attached to her, and would now listen patiently to the gentle remonstrances which before she had spurned with contempt. If Adele became more attentive to her lessons, more respectful to her grandmamma and aunts, and more good-natured towards the little ones, it was to Maud's influence that the change might be ascribed. "You know, Maud," she one day explained, "I never cared for being scolded, or for those grave looks from Aunt Harriet of which you think so much; but I *do* care when I see those soft pleading eyes of yours looking at me sadly and reproachfully, for then I know I am distressing your poor little heart, and I cannot bear to do that."

Maud pondered fondly and gratefully over this affectionate speech, though puzzled to think whether her cousin could really be good without confessing her fault about the letter; the same thought stirred Adele's own heart, and grew upon her spite of herself till she felt as if she were living in a hollow pretence of goodness which some day would crumble away, and show her real character in all its meanness and deceit. But to those who only saw the outward appearance she seemed so much improved, that grandmamma began to think her one of the best of children, and Aunt Harriet reproached herself for hasty judgment, and especially for that quickly rejected suspicion that Adele had had some share in the still unexplained mystery about Mr. Eden's letter. She wrote a hopeful ac-

count of her to him, and when in return she heard from him that he hoped soon to pay them a visit at Abbotsbrook, as his wife was projecting a stay of some weeks with her French relatives which would leave him free to follow his own plans, she rejoiced doubly at the thought that Adele was becoming such as he would be pleased to find her.

To Adele herself the news that her father was shortly to be expected, was by no means an unmixed pleasure; she loved him well enough to feel glad at the thought of seeing him again, but she trembled at the idea of standing before him, so honourable, so sincere, so upright as he was, with the consciousness of her unconfessed fault upon her; and still more she dreaded lest any unforeseen accident should reveal it to him. Only to Maud could she own this feeling, and to her she poured out a flood of regret, and shame, and terror, which scared and surprised the innocent child, who could not understand any feelings towards a parent but those of reverential love and confidence, and began to imagine her Uncle William must be one of the cruel ogre fathers of story-books, and quite of a different race from that dimly-remembered 'Papa' of her early childhood, on whose kind breast she had been wont to sob out her baby troubles without fear of misconception or expectation of rebuke.

"Is Uncle William so very cruel?" she asked at last.

"Oh! no, no, not that," explained Adele, "he is very good, and he means to be very kind, but he is

so terrible. If he knew what I have done he would never forgive me, he would not see any excuse for me as some people might. He is like Aunt Harriet, only sterner and graver; I could never have courage to confess my faults to either of them, I don't think any one could."

"But Adele," said Maud, "you know Cissy and I do often tell Aunt Harriet about things that we have done wrong; it is a little dreadful at the time, but we are much happier afterwards, and she is so kind.. Do you know I have really once or twice almost wished that it had been I who had read that letter, for then I might have confessed all to Aunt Harriet, and by this time I should be forgiven, and all would be right again; whereas now, every time she looks at me, I can see that she suspects I have done something naughty, and am hiding it from her."

"It is very unjust of her!" exclaimed Adele.

Maud looked down mournfully, but would not assent. "It must be my own fault," she said humbly, "if it had been Cissy Aunt Harriet would never have suspected her, but she knows I am so naughty."

The tears sprang to Adele's eyes, and jumping up she gave her cousin one of those vehement embraces by the warmth of which she endeavoured to atone for the unhappiness she had caused her. Maud gently and gratefully submitted to the caress, and fearful of seeming to reproach Adele, hastened to change the subject by asking if she

might assist her in mending some rents in her frock, which their aunt had pointed out, and desired her to repair.

Adele gladly accepted the offer, for though her fingers had a thoroughly French knack of skilfulness, she was by no means fond of needlework in any shape. She produced the dilapidated garment, and while she proceeded to darn the flounce Maud began to sew up a hole in the pocket, first removing some letters which it contained, and tossing them into her work-basket for safety till the repair was completed.

She was just putting in her last stitch, when Miss Eden's voice was heard in the hall, and catching away the dress from her, Adele bundled it up, and ran away with it, saying hurriedly, "Aunt Harriet told me to do it this morning, but I was so interested in those '*Contes nouvelles*,' that I forgot it; she will be vexed perhaps if she sees me doing it now."

Just as she vanished, Maud remembered the letters, and collected them neatly together, meaning to give them to her on her return. Among them was an empty envelope, which slipped from her hand, and floated down to the floor. It was still lying there, when Miss Eden entered; and with her usual instinct of neatness, she picked it up, together with some threads which Maud had dropped from her work. She was just beginning a playful "Untidy puss," when her eye caught the address on the envelope, "Miss Eden, Abbots-

brook," etc., unmistakeably in her brother's handwriting, and with the Amiens postmark.

"Where did you get this, Maud?" she asked in surprise, "it is the envelope of that very letter about which you behaved so mysteriously. I remember noticing that it was this pale pink colour, unlike what your uncle generally uses."

Astonished and frightened, Maud knew not what to reply, but she felt she must not mention Adele, and stammered out, "I don't know, I can't tell, I had not looked at it."

"Had not looked at it! when it was you yourself who dropped it; at least, I suppose so, since it was lying at your side, almost on your foot. Come, Maud, my poor child, be honest, do not let me have the unhappiness of thinking that you are trying to shield yourself by untruths."

Maud bowed down her head, and burst into tears; so Aunt Harriet suspected her of falsehood! How was she to bear it?

She tried to hide her face in her hands, but her aunt took hold of them gently, and looking full into her shrinking tear-wet eyes, said gravely, "Let there be an end to this concealment, you will be much happier when you have confessed your fault, whatever it may be. Do you think I have not noticed the sad shamefaced look you have worn for weeks past? Do you think I have not cared to see my poor little girl frightened and unhappy, feeling as I do that it is by her own fault? Don't let this last any longer; tell me all about it; come tell me."

She drew Maud up to her very kindly, so kindly that the child's heart seemed ready to burst with sorrow and affection.

"Oh, if I could tell you—if I *could*," she sobbed in agony.

"And why can you not? Is it that you are too much afraid of me? My child, you might have learned to trust me by this time."

Her voice was grave, reproachful, and yet tender. Maud would have given worlds to have been able to cling close and closer to that kind heart, and sob out all her sorrow. At this moment, Adele entered the room; she came in bright and smiling, lilting out a verse of the pretty little French song, "Tout pour toi," but her countenance changed suddenly when she saw Maud's face of distress.

She glanced at the envelope in her aunt's hand, her quick sense divined all in a second, but controlling her voice, she asked as coolly as might be, what was the matter, adding in a coaxing voice to Maud, "Qu'est ce que tu as, chérie? Have you hurt yourself? Pray do not cry so."

Maud raised her head, faltering, "Never mind me, Adele, go away, please go away." And Aunt Harriet said, "Yes, Adele, I don't think you can help us, thank you," adding a moment after, "perhaps it is we though, who had better go away; come up to my room with me, Maud."

Pale and trembling, yet still obedient, Maud rose to follow her, but Adele sprang between them. "Aunt Harriet, you are not angry with Maud?" she exclaimed, in earnest pleading accents, "please,

please 'don't be angry, she is good, she is indeed."

"I am not angry," said Miss Eden, quietly, "I am only grieved, as Maud knows I have good reason to be. You are a kind little girl, Adele, for wishing to defend your cousin, but you need not be afraid to trust her with me."

Kind! Adele's brown cheek reddened at praise so undeserved, she stood ashamed and irresolute, not daring to speak again, and her aunt and cousin passed her, and went on into the hall. But there an unexpected sight met their eyes.

The butler was opening the door to a tall dark gentleman, wrapped in a travelling cloak, who at sight of Miss Eden hurried forward, and with the exclamation, "Harriet, my dear sister," clasped her closely up to him, and kissed her with a warmth and tenderness which at once dispelled Maud's notion of the "cruel ogre," though she still thought "Uncle William" rather a formidable-looking person. He turned to her with a kindly greeting, and she felt bitterly ashamed of the red eyes and tear-stained cheeks, which however at the moment he did not appear to remark.

"Adele is here," said Miss Eden, leading the way to the schoolroom, and on the threshold Adele came to meet them, throwing herself into her papa's arms, and embracing him "avec effusion," as she would herself have said; a proceeding which Maud could scarcely reconcile with the opinion she had expressed of him about an hour before.

Still encircling her with his arm, he inquired for his mother and Anna, and hearing that the former was taking a nap, and the latter out walking with some of the children, he drew a chair to the fire, and began to warm himself, and give an account of his journey.

Miss Eden wanted to go and wake her mother, but he would not hear of it. "No, no, let her rest," he said, "she will better bear the excitement of seeing me, if she has had a little sleep first; perhaps I ought not to have taken you so by surprise, but Therèse left me sooner than she had intended, and it was an irresistible temptation to me to follow my letter. It seems ages since I saw this dear old house and its inhabitants; sit down, Harriet, and let me look at you."

Smiling, she drew a low chair to his side, and turned her face up to his; it was singularly like his own, only softer and younger, but he did not think of that, he saw that it was paler and thinner than it had been used to be, and anxiously remarked, "You look quite worn, Harriet, and spite of your smile, you have an anxious pained expression. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Nothing particular, you uncomplimentary man," she answered, as lightly as she could, "but we were in a little perplexity just when you arrived, and I suppose that has made me look anxious." As she spoke she glanced involuntarily towards Maud, who was standing by the table, longing to

run away, but not venturing to do so without leave from her aunt.

"Somebody in disgrace?" asked Mr. Eden, now noticing for the first time his niece's sorrowful countenance. "I hope my little girl has not been misbehaving, eh, Adele?"

"Oh! no," said Miss Eden warmly, "Adele knows that I have been much pleased and satisfied with her lately; she is not in the least to blame."

"Is that so, Adele?" he said, much pleased, and holding her from him that he might look into her blushing face.

Maud turned away. "Yes, let her take all, praise and all," she said to herself, "I must let myself be thought naughty, for I have promised, and I will be good, *I will*, though it is so difficult."

But the sacrifice was not required.

Before those clear searching eyes, to which she had never dared to look up with falsehood on her lips, Adele could not maintain the deceit by which she had imposed upon her aunt: sinking down to the ground, she buried her head on her father's knees, and with a gush of tears that seemed like the overflow of her weeks of pent-up misery, she faltered out, "Oh! papa, Maud is good, it is I, it is I who am wicked; *I* read Aunt Harriet's letter, I would have burnt it if Maud had not taken it from me, and I have let her bear all the blame." Then before he could speak, she looked up at him almost wildly, exclaiming, "Oh! papa, do you hate me? do you hate me? yes, I see you do,

vos regards me tuent! Ah! que je suis malheureuse!"

"What is it? I don't understand," said poor Mr. Eden, looking up anxiously at his sister, "What is that about a letter?"

Miss Eden explained as shortly as she could the loss of her letter, and the way it had been returned to her, adding, "it was not till this moment that I knew Adele had anything to do with it. I am so sorry you should have such a melancholy greeting, William."

"Never mind that, let us think of this unfortunate child," he said sadly, "stand up, Adele, no need to crouch to me."

Adele rose, but trembling so that she could hardly stand; all her terror of her father had returned, and she clung convulsively to her aunt, sobbing out, "Oh! don't let him speak to me, don't let him look at me, let me hide away somewhere till I can go back to mamma."

Miss Eden soothed her as well as she was able, and turning to her brother, said pleadingly, "You see she is not fit to be talked to now, let me take her up stairs to lie down for a little, and by and by she will tell you all about it." He assented coldly, and saying that he saw Anna coming down the lane, and would go to meet her, he took up his hat and strode away.

Aunt Harriet only waited to see Adele safely into her own room, and to promise that she would come to her ere long, and then she hastened down

stairs again. "I must think of my own child now," she said to herself, "poor Maud, poor innocent, who has borne all my injustice so patiently," but Maud was nowhere to be found.

She did not answer when her name was called, and Miss Eden was presently obliged to pause in her search to give directions to the maid who was preparing her brother's room, and while she was still speaking, her mother's bell rang, and she had to hurry away to her, to inform her of William's arrival. Then, when Anna and he came up together, and grandmamma was safe in her son's arms, there was poor Adele to be thought of, so all Aunt Harriet could do was to tell Cissy whom she met on the stairs, to go and look for Maud, and let her know when she had found her.

She was engaged in the difficult task of persuading Adele to look on her fault with simple contrition, instead of exaggerated despair, when Cissy tapped at the door. Adele begged she might come in, and listened anxiously to her intelligence, "I have found Maud, and she is up in the old lumber room, and oh! she is crying so, and she will not tell me what is the matter."

"I must go to her," said Miss Eden, rising, "shall I leave Cissy with you, Adele?"

Adele eagerly assented, she evidently dreaded being left alone lest her father should come to her, and made Cissy promise to remain with her till her aunt came back. Miss Eden lingered a moment till she saw Cissy seat herself on the bed, and

take poor Adele's aching head on her shoulder; then feeling that she might safely be left with this tender little comforter, she closed the door and hurried away in search of Maud. Maud was up at the top of the house, in the old lumber room, weeping bitterly, as Cissy had described her, grieving for Adele, thinking over her own past conduct, and wondering whether now Aunt Harriet knew all, she would forgive her for having refused to answer her questions. From these reflections she was roused by a soft arm passed round her neck, and turning quickly she saw her aunt's face looking down upon her with tender solicitude.

"Maud, my own dear child." Those few words were enough; they showed that the estrangement was passed, that Aunt Harriet was no longer displeased with her, and full of joy at the thought Maud sank into the fond embrace, which never before had seemed so welcome or so warm. There were a few broken sentences of explanation, and Maud told how her promise had bound her lips, but she did not seem anxious to justify herself, or to detail her past unhappiness. "You forgive me, you love me, Aunt Harriet, then all I am grieved about now is poor Adele," she affirmed with the utmost sincerity, and Miss Eden silently thanked God for her darling, and would not spoil her unconscious humility by a word of praise.

"We have had a very happy ten minutes among these old boxes," she said presently, "but I don't think it will quite do for us to stay any longer

here; I must go to Adele, and when you have washed your face you had better come too. I do not want you to stay with her, but just to speak a few words to show that you are feeling for her; she is very unhappy, as indeed she deserves to be, poor child; but I do not wish her to fancy that she has forfeited all claim to our affection."

"Oh! no, no, it was very good of her to tell, was not it, Aunt Harriet?"

Miss Eden smiled involuntarily as she answered, "Scarcely that, but it was a step in the right direction, though tardily made; now I want to persuade her to make a full confession to her father, it is sad that she should be so much afraid of him."

Maud assented, and they went down together; as they passed grandmamma's room, Mr. Eden came out. "So this is my little girl's victim," he said, looking down sadly, yet kindly, at Maud; "you must try to forgive her, my dear, she has not been so well taught as you have," and he sighed heavily.

"Oh! but she will be good now," said Maud, affection getting the better of her timidity, "she has been very kind to me, and I love her very much; please don't be angry with her, please say you will forgive her, she is so very sorry."

"She has a generous little champion," was the gentle answer, and with a smile as sad as it was sweet Mr. Eden turned away to his own room.

No, he was not the cruel ogre, that was certain;

but Maud was puzzled about him, and could not feel sure whether she should like him, an indecision which further acquaintance did not immediately remove. He was certainly very kind to her, and she liked his manner to her aunts, and his tender, dutiful behaviour to her grandmamma; but she wondered how he could persist in such sternness towards his unhappy little daughter.

When Aunt Harriet came to her bedside that night, she could not help saying, "Isn't it rather cruel of Uncle William to speak in that cold miserable way to Adele? If I were she I would much rather he should give me a great scolding and have done with it; don't you think it would be better?" but Miss Eden only answered, "I think we must leave him to judge what is best for Adele," and Maud felt rebuked, and made no more strictures on her uncle.

But in her secret heart, Miss Eden almost agreed with Maud; she had a natural frank love of speaking out, and had saved her little nieces and nephews many fears and heart-sinkings, by always saying what she thought necessary directly she discovered their faults, and then as soon as penitence was expressed, receiving them to full forgiveness, and treating them just as before.

She was grieved for her brother, whose home-coming was thus overclouded; grieved for Adele, whose terrified unhappiness was most painful to witness; and anxious about her mother, who still weak from her recent attack of illness, had been a

good deal agitated by the meeting with her son, whom she had not seen for some years. She did her best for them all, and sympathized heartily with each of them; but when late at night she sat down to write to Mr. Churchill, and tell him of her brother's arrival, a throb of delight shot through her, at the idea that he had been right about Maud, and that her darling was really the innocent truthful child, which lately she had not dared to think her.



CHAPTER XVI.

EASTER EVE.

"Do not these camellias look lovely?" exclaimed Miss Eden, as she stepped back to survey the effect of her work,—a large wreath running along the chancel-screen of Abbotsbrook Church, the white flowers contrasting well in their snowy purity with the dark oak carving against which they rested. Her words were addressed to Cissy, but it was not Cissy's voice that answered, "very lovely, 'meet for the Master's use,' as far as anything earthly can be: I congratulate you on the success of your work."

"Arthur!" said Miss Eden, turning round brilliant with pleasure, hushed in its expression by the sanctity of the place, "I did not expect you so soon, you must have taken a very early train; but oh! before we talk of anything else, come and see your window, the men have just finished putting it up, and it looks so glorious!"

She led the way into the chancel, and turned so as to face a beautiful stained glass window fixed in the northern wall, which was shedding its golden, purple, and rose hues, on the encaustic pavement below. Its subject was the offering of gifts for the Tabernacle by the women of Israel, and they were represented advancing with their "bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and tablets, all jewels of gold," in humble intent to present them as an offering unto the LORD, Whose servant Moses, awful in patriarchal and prophetic dignity, stood ready to receive them from their hands. There they came, devout women, with earnest spiritualized faces, all common cares of self-gratification and adornment laid aside, their only thought how by lowliest humility, and deepest love, they might make their offerings acceptable at the shrine of their heavenly King. The "spirit made willing" shone in those upturned eyes, trembled on those parted lips; they looked the very type of that self-sacrificing adoration which finds its highest and purest joy in pouring out its richest and costliest treasures before the feet of the great Giver of all glory and all wealth.

On an illuminated scroll, beneath the window, might be read the words, "In memory of Cecilia Churchill;" and to her by whose desire, and at whose expense, this beautiful chancel had been restored and adorned, this offering of a son's love was fitly dedicated.

For a while neither Miss Eden nor Mr. Churchill

spoke, but at last she lifted her brimming eyes, and said softly, "I shall never regret again that you were not allowed to make art your vocation, Arthur; this is better than any fame, it is the fittest use you could have made of the talent we once thought wasted."

He did not immediately answer, he was watching those brilliant rainbow tints which flickered over the place where 'Cecilia Churchill' had so often knelt in lowliest adoration, and reached even that snow-white monumental slab on which the names of "Dudley Arthur Churchill and Cecilia his wife," shone plainly legible in the clear spring sunshine.

"You know it was my father's great desire that she should have a memorial window erected to her," he said presently, in a hushed voice, "he had several designs made, but was not pleased with any of them, and I am glad now that it was left for me to do; I did not know until this moment how happy it would make me to feel that I have been able to fulfil this wish of his."

"And by your own hand, that makes it so much better."

"Yes indeed, it seems as if the gift which my father despised so much, has at last been turned to a use of which even he would have approved. It is a *great* pleasure to see this long planned undertaking so happily accomplished. Thank you, Harriet, for watching the workmen's progress, and reporting it so faithfully."

"It was a pleasure to myself, I liked to watch them at work, and oh! this morning, when their ladders and tools were taken way, and I saw it in all its beauty, it was such happiness. Mr. Lascelles came with me to look at it; you should have seen his face, it seemed as if not till now he had thought his church complete."

Mr. Churchill smiled thoughtfully, but the mention of his uncle had recalled him to ordinary life, and saying, "I must not be selfish in my joy, you will want to hear of Rafe," he gave one more long look at this the most cherished work of his hands and quietly turning away, left the chancel, followed by Harriet.

They walked gently down the aisle towards the western door, and Cissy resisted a strong inclination to follow them, feeling that they must have much to say to each other, and that her welcome would keep for a little while. She was left quite alone, for the others were making wreaths at the rectory, under Mr. Lascelles' superintendence, which were not to be brought into the church till they were finished and ready to fix in their places. She had assisted her aunt in the weaving of the beautiful camellia garland, and had just been helping to dispose it in its right place, when Mr. Churchill arrived. She longed to run off to see her dear Rafe, who must needs be come home since Mr. Churchill was, but she did not like to interrupt her aunt to ask permission, so she sat down patiently on a low seat near the pulpit, occupied

on Sundays by old Mrs. Fearnley, and thought over the Easter Hymn from the 'Christian Year,' which she had been learning to say to her grand-mamma on Easter morning.

She had not a very good memory, so learning by rote was no easy task to her, and it was not without infinite pains that she had mastered this long poem; but in thus dwelling on it she had learned to understand its beauties, and enter into its meaning, in a far deeper way than many a quicker intellect might have done. As she repeated to herself the words, 'Our only LORD is risen and gone,' her glance turned involuntarily towards a small halfmoon window of stained glass over the north door, in which our LORD's Resurrection was represented; and as she gazed a figure darkened the doorway, and advanced across the transept. It was Rafe, more upright, more blooming, more joyous-looking, than she had seen him for years past; in a moment her loving arms were round his neck, her rosy lips pressed to his, "Oh! my darling, my darling!" she murmured in the fulness of her innocent heart. He returned the embrace as tenderly but with less emotion, and drawing Cissy's hand within his own, advanced towards the chancel to examine the beautiful wreath.

"Is it not pretty?" murmured Cissy, softly, "and will not the church look lovely when all the other wreaths are up? Maud and Adele are weaving some at the rectory; I dare say they will be here with them soon; but before they come,

let us go together, and look at Mr. Churchill's window ; it is here, inside the chancel."

"What window?" asked Rafe in surprise.

"Oh! has he not told you? Come, and you will see; it is a memorial window to his mother, and he has been a long time doing it. Aunt Harriet says, when he went abroad last time, it was chiefly to get some particular glass that he wanted for it."

"And he has been doing it lately? I wonder he never told me."

"Why, I don't think he likes to talk about it, and Aunt Harriet says we are not to speak of it to him. But is it not beautiful? I think it is the prettiest in the Church, though the others were done by people whose profession it is. You know why he chose that subject? Because it was his mother who first thought of having the church restored. She began at the chancel, and Aunt Harriet told me she really gave up her luxuries, and made many sacrifices, that she might be able to have it as handsome as it is, with that magnificent east window and all. She died just when the chancel was completed, and then the work was stopped, for her husband could not make up his mind to go on with it. Aunt Harriet says he had not the heart to when his wife was no longer there to say how she would like it to be, but I can't help thinking, it would have been nicer to have finished it, and made it his monument to her, as it were. Don't you understand?"

"Yes, and I think so too, but I am almost glad it was left for our Mr. Churchill to do. I think very good beautiful things like restoring a church, should always be done by very good people."

"So do I, but I don't know," said gentle Cissy, "whether it is right for us to talk as if old Mr. Churchill was not good. I don't think I could have *liked* him, because he was so very harsh to our King Arthur when he was a little boy; but perhaps here," (and she cast a reverent glance around,) "we ought to say and think the best of him that we can with truth."

Rafe tacitly assented. "I am thinking," he said presently, "how *very* kind it was of Mr. Churchill to go to Brighton with me, when he must have wanted to stay and see this put up; you don't half know how good he has been to me, Cissy."

"I think I can guess," she answered smiling, "but you must tell me all about it presently."

Outside the church came a sound of happy voices, and Rafe and Cissy went out at the door, and down the rectory path as it was called, to meet Maud, Adele, and Charlie, who were advancing up it. Whilst they were displaying their wreaths, and exclaiming how well Rafe looked, and how nice it was that he was not tired by his journey, their aunt and Mr. Churchill came by a cross path to join them, and Rafe ran to meet Aunt Harriet, while Mr. Churchill hastened on to greet his little friends.

"My bonnie boy!" that was the first thing that

came to Aunt Harriet's lips, when she saw the improvement in Rafe's appearance; then the matter-of-fact inquiries, "should you be walking about after your journey? Have you had anything to eat? I meant to have been at home to receive you, but had no idea you would come so early; have you seen grandmamma?"

Rafe's answer was first an irrepressible laugh, then an assurance that he was not much tired, and that he had had enough refreshment on the journey to last for a week. "I saw grandmamma for one minute," he added, "but she was busy giving directions about the making of some wonderful Easter cake, so when Mr. Churchill started off to come to you, I thought I might as well follow him."

"Then you did not see your uncle, nor Anna?"

"No, Price said they were in the kitchen garden; if it had only been Aunt Anna, I would have gone to her there, but I had not courage for the introduction to my uncle; and besides, Aunt Harriet, I wanted to come on to you."

"And yet I was almost the last to greet you; but it was not my fault, for I fancied you were at home all the time, where I must now take you, for I am sure you are tired; only first I must give you one more kiss for being such a good boy when away from my wing."

"Good! not much of that, all the goodness was Mr. Churchill's."

"*'Parlez du soleil et on en voit les rayons,'*"

said that gentleman, coming up just at this minute, "what are you saying about Mr. Churchill?"

"Complaining of his cruel tyranny of course," laughed Rafe, with an easy playfulness, which more than anything showed Miss Eden the pleasant footing they were on.

"Then it will serve you right to exercise a little of it now; see," and King Arthur held up his watch, "it is past three, and you have been stirring ever since eight this morning, so now it is high time you were at home and lying down."

"Very well," answered Rafe, so meekly, that Miss Eden's and Mr. Churchill's eyes met in an involuntary smile. "But," he added, hesitating, "will nobody come with me? what shall I do if I meet my uncle?"

There was such a piteous shyness in the tone that the smile deepened on both faces, but Miss Eden directly offered to go home with him, and they were taking the homeward path, when Mr. Churchill said, "Are we not behaving somewhat shabbily to *my* uncle? You were engaged to him for the church decking, were you not, Harriet? and I have promised to help Maud to fasten her wreath round the font; she told me in great dismay that Mr. Lascelles had been called away to see a poor sick woman, and she did not know when he would be back, so I offered to do my best to make up for his absence."

"I did mean to have woven another wreath," Miss Eden answered hesitatingly, "but then I did

not know Rafe would be home so soon. Perhaps I can send Anna to make it, or else you must do treble work, Arthur, and make up for my desertion, as well as your uncle's."

Mr. Churchill's only reply was a most innocent-seeming look at Rafe, which however had the curious effect of making the boy come forward immediately, affirming himself quite able to go home alone, and begging his aunt to stay and finish the church decking.

Miss Eden was so little accustomed to any self-denial on Rafe's part, that her face expressed an astonishment quite out of proportion with the occasion, and she was about to refuse his offer of sparing her with an affectionate assurance that she should enjoy the walk home with him, when King Arthur made a half comic, half peremptory gesture in the negative, and she suffered Rafe to depart alone, telling him she would follow ere long. He begged her not to hurry, and walked off quite cheerfully, without one shade of the aggrieved look which he had been wont to wear whenever his wishes were crossed. The change in him was so remarkable, and in Aunt Harriet's eyes so surprising, that as she walked slowly back to the church she playfully accused Mr. Churchill of having used art magic to effect such a transformation.

They found Maud lying in wait for them in the porch, and she immediately claimed Mr. Churchill's promise of assisting her with the decoration of the font, while her aunt went to measure the little

reading-desk, and see what sort of adornment would suit it best.

The work went on with equal rapidity and order now that the two elders were there to assist and direct; Mr. Churchill despatched the clerk who had come to offer his help for a fresh supply of flowers from the Abbots, and when they arrived Cissy claimed a large share of them for decorating the old carved wood seats where the almshouse women were accustomed to sit, though when Charlie cried out at her for what he called 'wasting' the bright blossoms of the pyrus japonica, and the clusters of Guelder roses, upon "a parcel of poor old women who were too blind to see them," she could make no better defence than a horrified "Oh! Charlie;" and it was Maud who pointing to the inscription round the almsbox, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me," answered gravely, "We must not despise the 'King's messengers,' you know, Charlie, and I daresay the poor old women will like these flowers much better even than *we* do, because they see them so seldom."

Adele's nimble fingers proved especially skilful in the floral adornments, and her wreaths were perhaps the most tasteful of any; she kept silent and apart from the others, but her gentle, humble expression showed that it was not the reserve of sullenness, but of self-abasement.

Mr. Lascelles returned from his charitable errand in time to assist in some of the arrange-

ments, and inspirit the workers by his earnest admiration and thanks. When all was complete it was too dark to judge of the effect, but the little party spoke contentedly of how it would look on the morrow, and set off cheerfully on their homeward way.

They found Rafe lying at his ease on the drawing-room sofa, apparently engaged in a very agreeable discussion with the uncle whom his imagination had pictured so formidable; while Anna was putting the last stitches in a little white-trimmed bonnet, intended as an Easter gift for one of her protégées in the village; and Dora was dancing merrily about, hindering her aunt, caressing her brother, and winning her uncle's heart by her pretty, innocent ways. Rafe's brotherly feeling was delighted at the cordial greeting which Mr. Eden bestowed on Maud, and he thought it was almost carrying modesty too far when he saw how she hastened to escape from her uncle's encircling arm, and how her blushes rose at his kindly words. Perhaps he would not have thought so, if he had seen Adele's eager, mournful face looking in at them from the doorway, and heard the sorrowful tones of her whisper to Maud as they went along the passage together, "That is the way papa used to look at and speak to *me*, but I suppose he never will again; you are the favourite now, and no wonder."

Maud's delicate, generous spirit shrank from assuming the part of favourite to her uncle, or from seeming in any way to claim the approbation

which since her unselfish conduct had been made known, every one appeared ready to bestow on her. It was sufficient for her that Aunt Harriet knew she had not been "so very naughty" as circumstances had made her appear, and that Mr. Churchill (whose good opinion she valued most highly) would now see that his trust in her had not been misplaced.

The evening passed quietly, every one felt that any peculiar gaiety or amusement would be unsuited to the calm peacefulness of an Easter eve.

Mr. Eden sat by his mother, and Anna came and leant over his chair, talking to him in the soft caressing tones with which, when a tiny little girl, she had been accustomed to address her "great big brother." The children assembled with work and books at the round table in the centre of the room, and Miss Eden drew her own little work-table into the window recess, and sat stitching away busily, listening with a tranquil happy face to the account Mr. Churchill was giving her of his stay at Brighton. Rafe's looks were sometimes directed towards them rather enviously; and at last his aunt beckoned him over and made room for him beside her, saying with a smile, "Now let us hear your account of Brighton; did you fall in love with the sea, too?"

"Very nearly," said Rafe, with an answering smile, "at least I wish I could live always by it. I like the soft splashing noise it makes on a calm day, it is a sort of undersong to one's thoughts; and there is something so grand in its roar when the wind is rough."

"Rafe heard all sorts of voices in the sea," said Mr. Churchill, with one of his looks of sunny mischief, "especially one very lovely day when we got out quite early, and went and sat on the chain pier all alone. The water was calm as a lake, and blue as the sky, and it rippled round the pier with a soft inviting sound, except every now and then when the spring breeze stirred it, and the waves came up white-crested, with a free joyous dash. I longed for a swim, or a good row ; but Rafe, more poetical, leaned over the railing, and murmured out,

" Läßt sich die liebe Sonne nicht,
 Der Mond sich nicht im Meer ?
 Kehrt wellen-athmend ihr Gesicht
 Nicht dappelt schöner her ?
 Lockt dich der tiefe Himmel nicht
 Das feucht verklärte Blau ?
 Lockt dich dein eignen Angesicht
 Nicht her in ew'gen Tau ?"¹

"Goethe's Fischer!" exclaimed Miss Eden, "oh, I remember that took Rafe's fancy when first he read it, and by the way you repeat that verse, Arthur, I suspect it is a favourite poem of your own,

¹ " Bathes not the lovely sun himself
 The moon, too, in the sea ?
 Doth not his ocean-breathing face
 Turn doubly bright on thee ?
 Doth not the deep sky thee entice,
 The moisture-brightened blue ?
 Doth not thine own face thee entice
 Here in eternal dew ?"

though you are pretending at this moment to be unpoetical."

"Well, I confess to sympathizing so far, but Rafe continued to gaze down into the sea as if he fully expected to see a 'feuchtes Weib' come forth, and presently we had some more of 'der Fischer,' till at last it came to—

' Sie sprach zu ihm, sie sang zu ihm,
Da war's um ihn geschehn ;
Halb zog sie ihm, halb sank er hin,
Und ward nicht mehr gesehn.'¹

And then of course I expected to see Rafe's coat-tails vanishing over the railings, and accordingly sprang to the rescue; but it was unnecessary, the poetical fit was over, and I only got growled at for my pains."

"All fair, I think, people have no business to be so very matter-of-fact, have they, Rafe?" said Miss Eden, who, in her anxiety to spare her nephew's sensitiveness, came out quite in a new character, "we shall begin to think you are growing commonplace, Arthur, and what should you say to that?"

She looked up in his face with a half playful half imploring look, but following the direction of his answering glance, she saw there was no need for her fears. Rafe's colour had risen a little certainly,

¹ "She talked to him, she sang to him,
Till all with him was o'er ;
Half drew she him, half sank he in,
None saw him evermore."

but he was smiling with unmistakeable good humour, and was even sufficiently at his ease to make a playful retort.

"Mr. Churchill has his own romance about the sea," he said gaily, "if he does not believe in mermaids, he has the most exalted ideas of ocean caves and other wonders of the deep; he talks of the sea flora as familiarly as other people do of roses and geraniums, and in fact he seems to know so much of what goes on under the waters that I am beginning to consider him quite 'uncanny.'"

"Now, would anybody believe that the useful knowledge I tried to drum into that boy's head should be stigmatized as a romance of my own?" exclaimed Mr. Churchill, lifting his hands with a tragi-comic gesture. "It is well you have escaped from my dominion, Rafe, or I should certainly set you down to a stiff treatise on infusoria, or something of the sort, as a punishment for your ingratitude."

Rafe gave a laugh of roguish defiance; "I don't believe you have got such a thing, but you may lend me that book from which you read to me that lovely piece about the Indian Ocean, if you like, and I shall be very much obliged. I want to show Aunt Harriet that bit; it was like a fairy tale, especially that description of the little fish, sparkling in red or blue metallic glitter, or gleaming in golden green or silvery lustre, and flitting round the branches of the coral shrubs like 'humming birds of the ocean.' And oh that piece, 'Softly

like spirits of the deep the delicate milk-white bells of the jelly fishes float through this charmed world,' it was lovely, do please show it to Aunt Harriet."

"Why it seems to have proved as fascinating as 'the Middle Ages,'" said Miss Eden smiling, "how well you remember it."

"Yes, indeed, my pupil does me credit after all," rejoined Mr. Churchill, "I half suspect he found materials for a poem in this description of 'Marine Fauna' as scientific people call these fairy creatures."

Rafe blushed, and Maud, who had joined the little party at the work-table, here whispered a request that she might be allowed to see the verses.

His answer was a grunt not over gracious, but Maud knew that it only meant he was shy of having his poetical talents adverted to 'before folk,' and she doubted not that some day when they were alone he would gratify her wish.

She sat down on a little stool beside him, and leant her head against him, listening silently while the conversation flowed on again between her aunt and Mr. Churchill.

"I hope William intends to stay some time with you," King Arthur said presently, "he seems quite a stranger at Abbotsbrook."

"I think his stay will depend greatly on his wife's movements," Miss Eden answered, "except—he made a proposition to me last night which I must tell you about by and by."

Rafe politely rose, and went back to his seat by the round table, and Maud was following him when Mr. Churchill caught her hand, and saying, "Don't fly away yet, Lady Maud, Aunt Harriet and I have no intention of what Charlie calls 'talking secrets' just at present," made room for her between her aunt and himself.

She smiled, and looked towards Miss Eden, to be sure that she was welcome to remain. "Yes, come here, my poor little martyr," was the playful response.

"Poor little goose!" said Mr. Churchill, "oh! Maud! I thought you had more sense than to make a romantic sacrifice of yourself all to no purpose."

"But you know, I promised," said Maud, blushing crimson.

"Yes, but that was precisely the silly part of it; if I were a little girl, and had a good kind aunt, do you think I should be right to hide things away from her, and make her suspect I don't know what? don't you think it would be better for me to tell my little cousin, or friend, or whoever wanted me to help to conceal her fault, that I would not say one word against her voluntarily, but that if I were questioned I must speak the truth?"

"I never thought of that," said Maud, with tearful down-dropped eyes; then presently, with a half arch, half frightened glance at him, "are you *very* angry with me, Mr. Churchill?"

“I look so, I suppose,” he answered, smiling, “no, no, Maud, the little goose is a kind-hearted, honourable little creature, and I don’t think I could be angry with her if I were to try.”

The beauteous eyes shot up at him a glance of happy affection, from which all timidity had suddenly disappeared. “The little goose is much obliged to you,” she said, in her own merry tones.

But then this kind little creature saw that Adele was sitting silent and forlorn, and disengaging her hand from Mr. Churchill’s, she tripped away, and seating herself by her cousin, began to try and cheer her up.

“What a dear little damsel that is!” said King Arthur, when she was gone, “I give you great credit, Harriet, for not having spoiled her, it must have been a sore temptation.”

“Sometimes, but I think I must have rather a hard heart, for I managed to steel myself, and have been rather too strict than the reverse. I begin to feel afraid that in future days she will look back on me as a severe inexorable monitress, whom she feared more than she could love.” She drooped her head over her work, and Mr. Churchill could see that her eyelashes were glistening.

“That is so like having a hard heart, is it not?” he said affectionately, “and though you may not see it, I think every one else can see that Maud loves you better than anyone in the world.”

“Do you really think so?” Her face lit up into a glad surprise most beautiful to see, but she

said no more, and her next remark was that it was getting late, and she must send the children to bed.

"Practical as usual," laughed Mr. Churchill. "Oh! Harriet, what fun it would be to take you where there were no children to be sent to bed, and where we might bid farewell to prosaics for a time."

"And be foolish together," said Miss Eden, looking amused, "perhaps that may come to pass some time, but for the present you must allow me to be practical."

Before he could answer she had glided away, and was summoning the three younger ones from their employments. Maud and Dora rose with obedient alacrity, Charlie more reluctantly.

"It is so pleasant being all together," he urged in a tone of unusual sentiment.

"Very pleasant," his aunt answered brightly, "but you know we must be up in good time to-morrow. I want you all to come to me in the schoolroom before breakfast, and we will read the piece for Easter day in my book, as you call it."

"And may we sing the Easter hymn?" said Maud, "I know we shall have it in church, but it would be so nice to begin the day with it."

"Yes, I should like it very much, now good-night, my little ones." Something more than ordinarily tender in the tone made the children cling closer than usual in their caresses, and as she felt Maud's soft lips pressed earnestly and fondly

against hers, she feared no longer that 'severe and inexorable' would be the remembrance her little niece would retain of her.

Outside the door Maud turned back for a minute, and beckoned her aunt to her. "Dear Aunt Harriet," she said, "would you mind talking to Adele a little? She is so unhappy, and Uncle William hardly takes any notice of her. Perhaps it is naughty of me, but I cannot help thinking that I should not much like to have him for a father. I would rather have Mr. Churchill a great *great* deal, would not you?"

Miss Eden could not help smiling at the naïvete of the question. "I don't know that I ever thought of either of them in that light," she answered, "but I understand what you mean: however your uncle is really a very fond and kind father, and I am sure only treats Adele with displeasure because he thinks it right and good for her."

"I see," said Maud thoughtfully, "but you will comfort her a little, Aunt Harriet?"

"Yes, I will try, good-night, my kind little child."

Maud ran away to bed, her cheeks glowing with pleasure at the unaccustomed praise, and Miss Eden went back into the drawing-room, and seating herself between Cissy and Adele, engaged them both in a quiet but pleasant little conversation, which cheered the poor downcast culprit and smoothed away the gloom from her brow. It was touch in

to see the timid childlike way in which when bed-time came, she approached her father to wish him good-night. In her intercourse with him all her little airs and graces and attempts at dignity were laid aside, and Mr. Churchill thought he had never seen her look so simple or so natural, as when in answer to her father's searching look, and somewhat cold caress, she raised her brown eyes swimming with tears, and murmured humbly, "Oh! papa, forgive me, to-morrow ought to be a happy day, and I cannot be happy while you are displeased with me. I know now how wrong I have been, but please forgive me. I will try to be good."



CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

"Oh! joy, joy, I have such good *good* news for you," cried Maud, one day in the Easter week, as she raced down the garden walk towards a rustic arbour, where Rafe and Adele were seated in eager conversation. "It is not any nonsense, it is real, true, wonderful news; now guess what it can be."

"I think I know," said Rafe, "but I must not say until I am quite sure, because what I mean is a secret."

"I am sure I know," said Adele, decidedly, "but tell us, Maud, and then we will tell you if it is what we think it is."

"I don't think it can be," answered Maud, rather dismayed at finding that her intelligence might not be a surprise after all, "for this is my news,—Mr. Churchill is going to marry Aunt Harriet."

"Hurrah!" shouted Rafe, throwing his cap up in the air, "I guessed that was it, and they know

that I know; but when is it to be, Maud, and who told you?"

"Mr. Churchill told me himself; Cissy and I happened to go into the room when grandmamma and Aunt Harriet and he were talking, and when Aunt Harriet saw us, she walked to the window and called Cissy to her, and grandmamma told me to go to Mr. Churchill, and he would tell me something I should like to hear. He said it was to be soon, but I could not stop to hear much, because I was in such a hurry to come and tell you."

"But I hope you did the polite, and congratulated," said Rafe smiling.

"I gave him a kiss, and said he was a dear good King Arthur, and I was very glad. Was not that right?"

"Yes, admirable," laughed Rafe, amused at her naïvete, "and your delighted face is a congratulation in itself. I suppose you feel what Charlie calls 'tip top jolly,' at the idea of having your 'King Arthur' for an uncle?"

"Yes, indeed, if only he would not take Aunt Harriet away!"

"Why, you couldn't expect him to leave her here," said Adele, "she will be Mrs. Churchill of the Abbots, quite a grand lady."

"Oh, dear, it sounds so funny," said Maud, going off into a fit of happy laughter, from which she was startled by the exclamation, "Little giggling puss," and Mr. Churchill's hand laid lightly on her shoulder.

She was rather abashed at being caught in the midst of such a childish demonstration of glee, and pretended to scold Rafe for not having warned her of Mr. Churchill's approach, but King Arthur declared that the merry sound had quite delighted him, as it showed him that at least one person was not overwhelmed with grief at the "awful catastrophe" which it had been his "painful duty" to announce.

"I hope you did not expect to find me in tears," said Rafe, standing up with oh! such a bright affectionate face, "I find I cannot squeeze out any, not even crocodile, I am so very glad."

Mr. Churchill's sweet smile thanked him, but Maud whispered saucily, "There, you did not congratulate a bit better than I did, for all you said about it, Rafe," and then there was another laugh, under cover of which Adele, whose self-possession had for once deserted her, made her escape to the house.

"I am going home now," said King Arthur, presently, "as I have some business letters to write; but if you like to walk part of the way with me, Rafe, you shall hear a few more particulars of this terrible affair which has made us all so melancholy."

Rafe assented with alacrity, and turned towards the gate which opened out into the lane.

"But what shall *I* do?" asked Maud, who was evidently too much excited to think of returning immediately to her ordinary occupations.

"Go and talk it all over with Charlie," replied Mr. Churchill, "grandmamma has told him all about it, and the first thing he said was, 'I hope they will have a jolly big wedding cake!'"

Maud and Rafe both exclaimed, and Mr. Churchill admitted that he had told Charlie he did not deserve to have any cake at all for having made such a speech, to which the young gentleman had returned the unabashed answer, "That's all very fine for you to say, but I know you'll give me some!"

"Charlie is a queer little creature," said Rafe, as they took the road towards the Abbots, "I don't know how Aunt Anna will ever manage him."

"She will not have that task, at least I hope not," said Mr. Churchill, smiling, "he is to go to school, and if he is troublesome in the holidays, he can be sent up to us, your aunt and me, I mean, and we will take care of him."

"But I thought grandmamma had a great objection to schools?"

"She had, but your uncle has talked her over, and indeed Charlie is just a boy for school training—a strong, manly, fearless little fellow, able to stand knocking about, and with an honest sturdy character that will not be likely to learn deceit from the bad ways of other boys."

"No, he is very truthful," said Rafe, "that is his greatest merit."

The tone was rather grudging, and Mr. Churchill glanced keenly into his young companion's face as

he said, "It is not his only merit, he is a good specimen of an English boy, with his merry sun-burnt face, and happy light-hearted disposition. I must not spend the time in talking of him, for I have a good deal to tell you, but I just want to say, that you as his elder brother might have a great and good influence over him, might do more for him in fact than any one else can do. Will you not think of this?"

- Rafe's assent was not very gracious, but Mr. Churchill did not appear to remark it.

"I want to tell you some more of the arrangements that the family conclave, consisting of your grandmamma, your two aunts, your uncle, and myself have agreed upon," he said presently, "do you happen to remember my making inquiries from Adele some time ago, after a certain Claudine Villemain, whom she reported to have married a writing master?"

"Oh! yes, I remember perfectly, and Adele's horror at your owning to such a bourgeois acquaintance."

"Well, the writing-master it seems is an Englishman, and he, poor man, has been lately afflicted with a gradual loss of sight, so that instead of being able to maintain his wife, she has to maintain him. With a not unnatural predilection for his 'ain countrie,' he is anxious to come to England, and thinks his wife might obtain employment in some English family. So Claudine, or as I ought to call her, Mrs. Miller, went to your uncle just be-

fore he left Amiens, to ask his advice about going to England, and he was so delighted with her, and with all he heard of her from some families whose children she has been teaching, that he thinks your aunts cannot do better than invite her to settle herself at Abbotsbrook, and become a daily governess to your sisters."

"A French governess!" exclaimed Rafe, in horror, "I thought they were all odious creatures."

"Perhaps you derive your ideas of them from 'Mademoiselle Panache,' in Miss Edgeworth's amusing story?"

Rafe's blush was an assent.

"Pray do not take up a prejudice against her, she is a worthy little soul."

"And where are they to live?" inquired Rafe. "In that old house with the lilacs before it, which must certainly date from the antediluvian period?"

"Precisely, but your ideas of its antiquity are somewhat exaggerated, it was built by an ancestor of my own, and as I cannot boast of such a genealogy as the famous French family who a good way down the list of their progenitors have the intimation, 'About this time Noah entered the ark,' I can assure you its erection must be of post-diluvian date."

"That is satisfactory, but it is very much out of repair, is it not?"

"Terribly so, but as I am the landlord, you may be sure it will not long remain so now I see a chance of its being tenanted. That is one of the many things

which I have to see about in the month which is to intervene before my wedding day."

"Only a month! That is coming very near."

"Yes, but there are several reasons for its being soon, among others, that your uncle thinks he shall then be able to stay for it, and even perhaps remain with you while your aunt and I are abroad."

"Are you going to make a long wedding tour?"

"Not very, Harriet says she could not feel happy at leaving your grandmamma for more than three weeks or a month. You know when we are at home at the Abbots, they will be able to meet every day."

"It seems so funny to think of Aunt Harriet at the Abbots," said Rafe, raising his eyes to where the turrets of the old hall might be seen peeping through the trees.

"Yes, and it seems a gloomy place for a bride; but it shall be brightened up before she comes to it, I am going now to write orders for new furniture, &c."

"I know who will be glad to hear that," said Rafe, laughing at the remembrance of Adele's criticisms on her first visit to the Abbots, "but you will not spoil your old schoolroom, I trust. You don't surely mean to modernize that? It is so charming now."

"No, no; that shall not be touched, it is a relic of my boyish days, and I never go into it but the remembrance of old times comes back on me as freshly as ever. I have kept it just as my father

had it arranged for me, and I mean so to keep it as long as I live."

A silence fell over them both for a minute or two, which was broken by Rafe's saying, "I opine that the month you are away will be very deplorable, we shall all miss Aunt Harriet so much, we shan't know how to get on without her at all."

"No? but you must all do your best to cheer your grandmamma, and you as the eldest, Rafe, may do a great deal towards helping the younger ones to remember their aunt's rules, and act as they would if she were present."

"I will try," said Rafe, "but I would rather Uncle William was not going to stay with us; he is very agreeable to talk to, but I know we shall not get on together if I am left too much to his mercy."

"Why should you think so? He is not a very happy man I am afraid, and that makes him look grave and stern; but he is, and always was, a good kind fellow."

"Not my idea of one," said Rafe, laughing, "he is such a very formidable personage; why even Charlie is afraid of him."

"Perhaps that is just as well, for your grandmamma is very anxious that the little gentleman should behave well to him. It is he who is going to send Charlie to school, and I believe he means to have him out to Amiens in the holidays sometimes, and in fact, make it his business to watch over his education, and further his prospects in life."

"That is very kind," said Rafe, gratefully, "we must behave well to him now if it is only out of gratitude, but if I should be very much tempted to break the peace and launch out against him, may I relieve myself by writing to you?"

"Certainly, but take care I do not send you a long lecture in return."

"If you do, I shall read it, and as books say, 'endeavour to profit by it;' but I do not much think you will. You are more likely to dismiss the subject in one short severe little sentence which will stick in my memory and drive me to contrition."

"Bravo, Rafe, you are giving me a hint how to act. I shall begin to think the copybook maxim 'cultivate brevity of expression,' which my tutor used so often to set me, is really a saying of some worth."

"It is one which I most cordially admire," said Rafe, "I hate the long-winded speeches of two or three pages' length, beginning, 'believe me, my love,' or 'trust me, my dear young friend,' which are so often put into the mouths of aggravated elders in books."

"They are not so common as they used to be," rejoined Mr. Churchill, laughing; "when I was a little boy, and was allowed to read a story book, (which was a very rare occurrence) I used to skip half the pages, because they contained so many moral discourses; and once I remember Harcourt and I set to work to gum together some of the leaves of my story books, so that these obnoxious

passages, as we considered them, might no longer affront our eyes."

"What a droll idea!"

"I suppose it was, but the conclusion was less droll than lamentable, for my tutor caught us in the act, and inflicted summary chastisement."

"Horrid meddling old creature! but oh! I wanted to ask, is he alive still?"

"Yes, he lives at Oxford, where I sometimes pay him a visit. I have asked him to stay with me several times, but he will not be persuaded to leave his learned retreat. Shall I ask him to the wedding for your gratification? Perhaps for such a great event he might forego his objections to travel."

"No thank you, the bare idea is dreadful; why he would be worse than a death's head at the feast. But seriously, who will there be at the wedding? Not 'the grand Panjandrum with the little button on top' I hope."

"No, not any one answering to that magnate, unless it is my Aunt Clara. Harcourt and she are to be present; I think they and my Uncle Lascelles will be the only guests, except Victoria, who is to be one of the bridesmaids. It is to be a very quiet wedding, only with grand feastings for our humbler friends, my tenants, and the school-children."

"Oh! I am glad Miss Lindsay is coming; I like her, she has no nonsense about her."

"I should say she has a great deal, but perhaps not of the sort you object to. She is a great fa-

yourite of mine I confess, and I am very anxious that your aunt should know her, or rather perhaps that she should know your aunt. But see, although we have walked at a snail's pace, here we are at last, and I must go to my letters. Pray come in and rest however, I can find you a book to amuse you."

Rafe declined doing so, and walked slowly back to the village, pondering on the changes which were coming about so suddenly.

Just as he turned in at the garden gate, he met Mr. Lascelles coming out. "Well, am I to condole or congratulate?" asked the old gentleman, smiling.

"Oh! the latter by all means, sir," said Rafe, with an involuntary blush at the remembrance that he would once have thought condolence the most acceptable, "we are so glad to think of having Mr. Churchill for an uncle."

"And I am delighted at the thoughts of having your Aunt Harriet for a niece, so it seems we all have what we wish. Good-bye, my boy, I must be off to see my poor sick people."

"Now, there goes a kind good man, if there ever was one," said Rafe to himself, as he watched the old clergyman's retreating figure; "a clever man too, and yet he has been content to pass the best half of his life in this little poky village. And there is Mr. Churchill so cheerful and happy, though what amusement has he here but looking after his tenants, and just hunting and shooting a little?"

To be sure he has his painting, that is something: if I had only anything to work away at in earnest like painting, I might be happier than I am. I don't believe all the scribbling I used to do is worth anything, and yet what else can I do? I who—but oh! dear, I mustn't grumble, that won't do on any terms."

And checking the despondent bent of his reflections by this little remonstrance to himself, Rafe turned from the gate, and walked briskly to the house. He came into the midst of a discussion upon the comparative merits of lace and silk flounces for a wedding dress, upon which knotty point his grandmamma and his two aunts, together with Cissy and Adele, were solemnly deliberating. But at sight of him, Aunt Harriet started up, "Oh, Rafe, shall we have a little German to refresh ourselves?" she said, with a playfully-exaggerated gesture of weariness. "I never shall have spirits to wear the dress, if I am to spend so much time in thinking over it beforehand. Dear mother," going up to Mrs. Eden, "you shall settle it, you have better taste than I, and if it is your choice, I shall like it, whatever it may be."

"Then, grandmamma, have Brussels lace flounces, they are so handsome," cried Adele.

"But," observed prudent Cissy, "Aunt Harriet said she did not want anything too expensive."

"Yes, stand up for the economical side, Cissy,

like my own good child," said Miss Eden, turning back for a minute; and then she made her escape, while grandmamma smilingly observed, "That is so like my Harriet, she never did care about dress, except just to have her things ladylike and neat; but she shall have a pretty wedding gown, I will take care of that."

Miss Eden was often fain to take refuge from millinery discussions with Rafe and his German, and her chief pleasure in her trousseau seemed to be that the making of some of her habiliments furnished nice and profitable work for the Abbotsbrook school children.

A trip to London for shopping purposes was however inevitable, and she resignedly accepted an invitation from a kind old lady, a cousin of her mother's, to stay a week at her house in Hyde Park Street, and "make her purchases comfortably." But then Anna infected her mother with a dread, that Harriet if left to herself, would buy all her dresses of those melancholy shades beginning with a D, and said to be the only ones admissible to Quakers, "Dove colour, drab colour, dust colour, dirt colour, dun colour," till the good old lady, encouraged thereto by her son's presence, and her own tolerable health at the moment, decided that both sisters must go to London, so that Harriet's sombre taste might be corrected by Anna's livelier one.

This plan was at length carried into execution, not without a good deal of objection on the part of

Harriet, who feared lest the absence of both herself and Anna might occasion her mother some inconvenience, and would rather have promised to buy herself a 'cherry-coloured gown with grass green ribbons,' than that Mrs. Eden should suffer on her account.

It was a wonderful event to the children to be left without either of their aunts, although only for a few days. Holidays were proclaimed, and they were all adjured to good behaviour, a proceeding which it may be concluded was not wholly lost upon them, since on their aunt's return grand-mamma reported them as having been very good children indeed, despite a few facts which crept out by degrees, such as that Dora had done nothing but swing all day, that Charlie had rioted, and quarrelled with Rafe till summarily called to order by his uncle,—and that Maud had been found out of bed in the middle of the night, writing poetry by the light of a succession of matches! which last exploit was so severely commented on by the old nurse as 'a sinful waste of good lucifers,' and so unmercifully laughed at by the rest of the party, that Miss Eden thought enough had been said, and to Maud's great relief, never uttered a word to her about it.

Victoria Lindsay came to stay with her uncle at the rectory, and kept the little Edens in wild spirits by her merry pranks, though it is to be feared she occasionally reduced the good old rector and his housekeeper to the verge of despair. She took

a violent fancy to Miss Eden, and though Aunt Harriet's feelings of propriety were often sorely wounded by this wild creature's proceedings, she could not help giving her a considerable share of fondness in return; not forgetting, however, to warn her little nieces against following in Victoria's footsteps.

A happy grateful letter of acquiescence was received from Mrs. Miller (née Villemain) in reply to the invitation to her to settle herself at Abbotsbrook, and the united exertions of bricklayers and painters was fast turning 'the old house with the lilacs' into a most habitable abode.

A good school was fixed upon for Charlie, to which however it was not thought worth while to send him till after the midsummer holidays, and Rafe received an odd but very kind letter from old Mr. Mortimer, inviting him to accompany him to Königsbad in the following autumn. Altogether, the plans of the Eden family seemed to be prospering highly, and all now looked forward cheerfully to the wedding, which was to make so great a change in this quiet family circle.

* * * * *

A great deal might be said of the wedding; of the bride in her pensive stately beauty; of the handsome happy bridegroom,—of the six young bridesmaids in their dresses of blue and white,—of grandmamma, glad, and proud, and tearful all at once,—of Harcourt with his oddities,—of Charlie with his wild merriment,—of the dinner to the te-

nantry in Mr. Churchill's park,—of the school-children with their tea and cake in the glebe fields.

But all this may be safely left to imagination, and what remains to be said is only a few words as to how the little party prospered when all the gaiety was over, and they returned to their ordinary life.

The wedding tour was happily accomplished, and Aunt Harriet came home so bloomingly beautiful and gay, that the children thought she had certainly grown years younger in the interval. Under her cheerful dominion the Abbots looks gloomy no longer, while its master is merrier than ever, and passes his time in conceiving and executing generous schemes of good for the people under his care, which he fondly hopes may help to make them as happy in their way, as he is in his.

Adele has returned to France with her father, a wiser, better, and happier girl; she is fast becoming so dear and pleasant a companion to him, that he talks no more of sending her to school. And though she has sufficient taste for gaiety left to convince her lively mamma that 'cette petite' has not been metamorphosed into a dull humdrum English girl, she no longer thinks fêtes and parties the grand business of existence.

Over the Abbotsbrook schoolroom reigns with absolute yet gentle authority a plump, good-humoured, vivacious little Frenchwoman, whose fine dark eyes so full of life and sweetness are the only remains of that brunette beauty which captivated

Mr. Churchill's boyish taste some ten or eleven years ago. At home with her poor blind husband, she indulges in daily raptures over "*ces charmantes petites demoiselles*," more especially over Maud, whom she declares to be "*une veritable ange de beauté et de talent*;" but she is a discreet little personage, and does not let the charms of her amiable little pupils prevent her from keeping up a proper amount of discipline, which she finds all the more necessary because grandmamma and Aunt Anna have still a huge facility for spoiling, and can never be brought to anything beyond the seldom executed threat, "My dear children, if you are not good, we must really tell Aunt Harriet the next time she comes to see us."

Rafe is at Königsbad with Mr. Mortimer, he writes long cheerful letters full of all he has heard and seen; and especially of Ernst Meinhels, whom he almost idolizes, and with whom he has already arrived at a mutual thou-ing.

Charlie is at an English public school, and so far as can be judged from his weekly notes is very happy there, though as they seldom contain more than "Dear grandmamma, I'm as jolly as possible, and so are all the fellows. They all think my cricket-bat a stunner, and we enjoyed that big cake you sent me very much. Please send me another soon, and with love to everybody, believe me your affectionate grandson, Charles Edward Eden," it cannot be exactly determined in what his happiness consists. That he has not lost his affectionate heart or

honest disposition however, is manifest by the contents of an occasional postscript, such as this: "I hope you are well, and jolly yourself, dear granny, and that my dear little Aunt Anna is as pretty as ever, and please tell Dora when I come home I will give her the highest swing she ever had;" or, "My love to Aunt Harriet, and I want to tell her that I know I did some things I shouldn't last week, but I'm going to turn over a new leaf, for I haven't forgot what I promised her when I said good-bye. And tell Uncle Arthur that one of the masters here was as cross last week as ever his old tutor can have been, but that I know I deserved it, so I'm not going to complain."

Mr. Lascelles is as active and kindly as ever, though he begins to call himself very old, and has at last consented to have the assistance of a curate, under whose influence Abbotsbrook bells now ring out their matins and evensong all through the week, and summon the inhabitants of hall and cottage to the privilege of daily prayer. The old Rector, with his white head but still erect figure, may often be seen pausing in his errands of mercy, to speak to a young, handsome, blooming lady, whose little pony carriage may be found almost daily at the door of one poor cottager or other, to whom 'Mrs. Churchill of the Hall' appears a not unworthy type of the kindly Lady Bountiful of former times. A yellow-haired damsel, with a world of lovingkindness in her round blue eyes, is often her companion, and sometimes her substitute,

in these charitable errands; and the Abbotsbrook villagers declare with hearty and unmistakeable appreciation, that "Miss Cecilia Eden is the tenderest hearted, and most blessedest young lady that ever was," one whom "it may be easy seen takes after the old squire's lady that's dead and gone, bless her heart," that is to say after her god-mother, the Cecilia Churchill, on whose white tomb rests a glory from the radiant window, which a son's talent and a son's love erected to her gentle memory.

And Maud? Innocent, loving, impulsive Maud, how does she prosper under these new circumstances? Outwardly, she is lovelier than ever, the large lustrous eyes seem each day to expand into brighter and brighter intelligence, the roses of health are deepening in the fair cheeks, the broad white brow is now seldom sullied by a frown. And inwardly? who can tell the pure happiness of that little heart, ambitious only of goodness, content with everything but its own failings, and full of that sweet, unselfish love which has made Maud 'grandmamma's and Aunt Anna's darling,' Aunt Harriet's 'precious child,' and perhaps the dearest of the five dear little friends of the Master of Churchill Abbots.

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